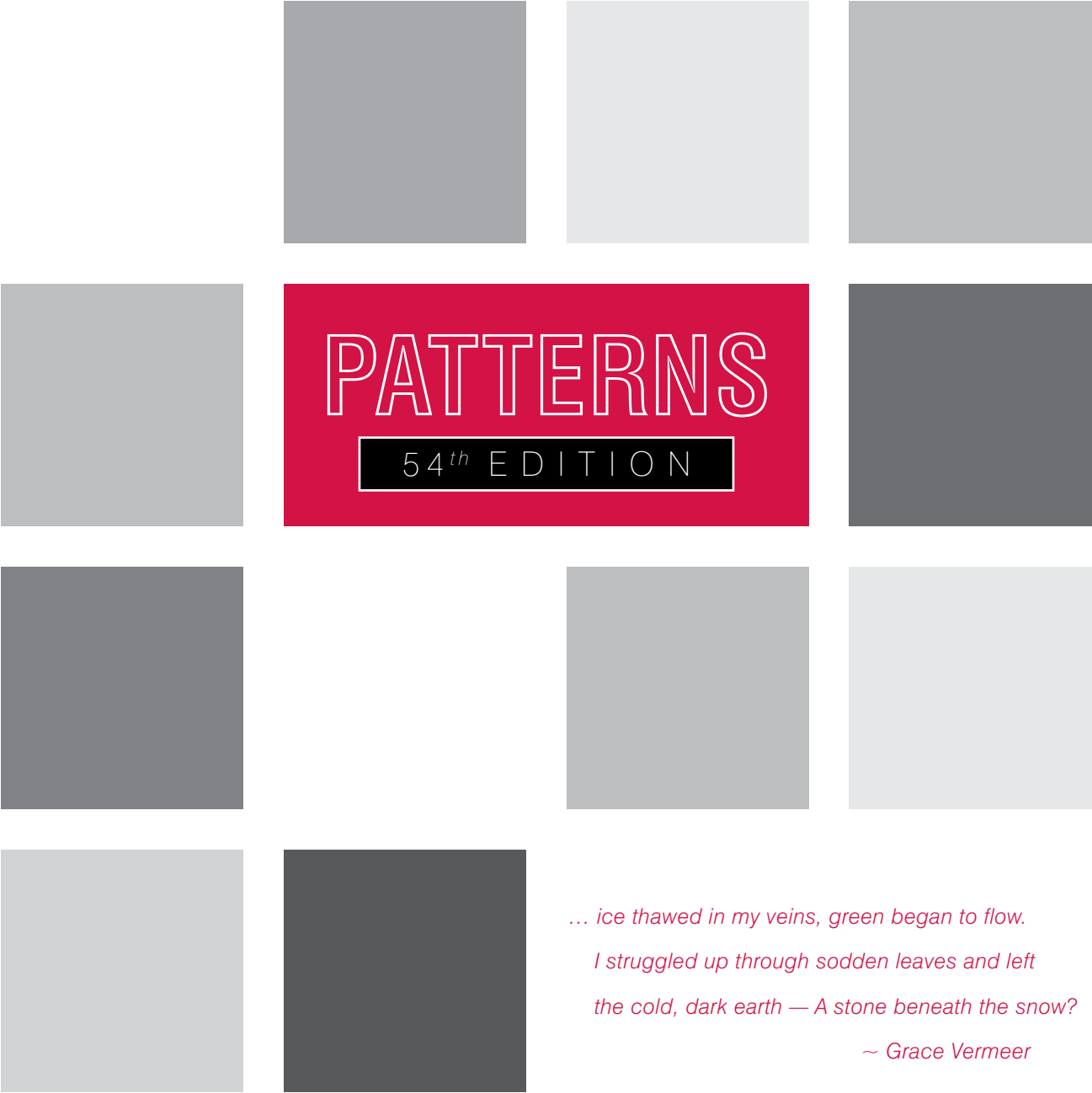


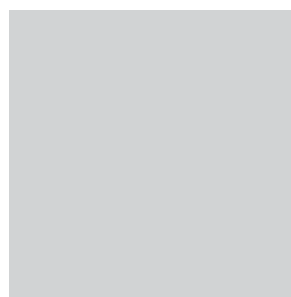
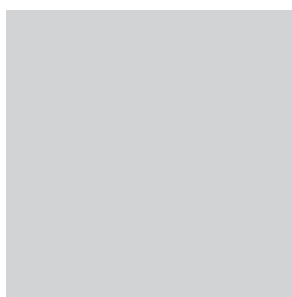
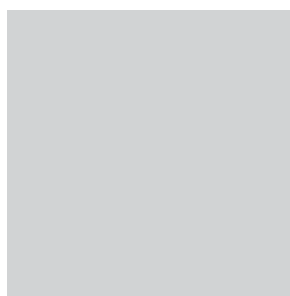
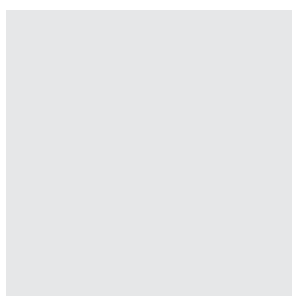
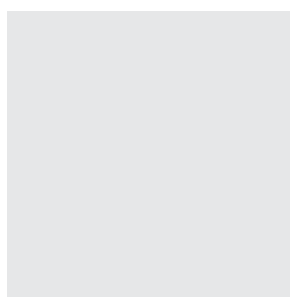
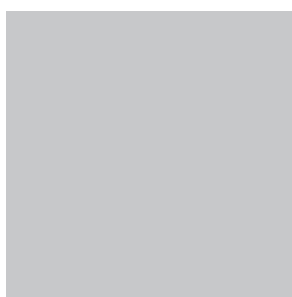


PATTERNS

54th EDITION

*... ice thawed in my veins, green began to flow.
I struggled up through sodden leaves and left
the cold, dark earth — A stone beneath the snow?*

~ Grace Vermeer



PREFACE

What is *Patterns*?

Patterns magazine is St. Clair County Community College's literary and arts publication. Published annually since 1959, *Patterns* showcases the best writing and visual artwork produced by SC4 students each year. While organization and oversight of the publication has always been handled by SC4 faculty and staff, over the years we have increasingly involved students in every aspect of the publication; from producing its content, to editing, to the creative layout and design work, our students have taken on a major role in creating each issue of the magazine.

***Patterns* Writing and Art Competition**

Since its inception, *Patterns* has featured student writing and artwork selected as the result of a competition conducted in the fall of the year. Panels of volunteer judges in the faculty of English and Visual and Performing Arts determine which works will be published. Beginning with the initiation of the *Patterns* Visiting Artists Forum (see below), professional writers from outside the college have selected the top prize winners in poetry, fiction, and essay writing.

Visiting Artists Forum

In 2000, SC4 Professor Jim Frank applied for a grant to fund the first *Patterns* Visiting Artists Forum, a program that invited professional writers of national and international repute to act as judges for the *Patterns* competition and to come to our campus in April to conduct writing workshops; meet with students, faculty, staff, and community members; and to give public readings of their own work. Frank's initiative has continued, and, for more than a decade, we have been privileged to host poets, novelists, playwrights, and essayists of the highest caliber — including winners of such honors as the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

This year, novelist Jaimy Gordon and poet John Rybicki are serving as visiting authors for the forum. Biographical notes introducing these two authors are published later in this volume. We express our gratitude to the National Endowment for the Arts for making this year's forum possible.

54th edition of *Patterns*

In many ways, the 54th edition is a fairly representative example of what we've been doing for the past half-century, but you may note that this issue marks the second year in which we have been able to include full-color pages to expand our reach in terms of the kinds of artwork we are able to publish. This also will be the first year in which *Patterns* will be available online. Finally, this is the first issue in which we have included art in the form of writing as part of the cover. For many years, student black and white artwork was used as cover art. This year, the layout and design team elected to include a short passage of poetry to act as a kind of frontispiece. The three lines you see on the cover of the 54th edition come from the poem "The Snow Crocus" by Grace Vermeer. This six-stanza villanelle first was published in the 50th edition of *Patterns*. (Copies of that issue are still available — please inquire with the SC4 Communications Department if interested.)

VISITING AUTHORS

Jaimy Gordon

Jaimy Gordon's novel *Lord of Misrule* won the National Book Award in 2010, as well as the Tony Ryan Award for the year's best book about horse racing; it was also a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, 2011. Gordon is the author of three previous novels, *Shamp of the City-Solo*, *She Drove Without Stopping*, and *Bogeywoman*, which was on the *Los Angeles Times*' list of Best Fiction of 2000. Gordon has been a Fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Mass., and the Bunting (now Radcliffe) Institute at Harvard University. In 1991, she received an Academy-Institute Award for her fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Born in Baltimore, she lives in Kalamazoo and teaches at Western Michigan University and in the Prague Summer Program for Writers.

John Rybicki

John Rybicki's most recent book of poems is *We Bed Down Into Water* (Triquarterly Books, 2008). Two of the poems in the collection appeared in *The Best American Poetry* anthologies. His latest collection, *Who Can Say What Sea*, will be the inaugural book of poems put out by Lookout Books (Winter 2012). One poem from the collection received a Pushcart Prize. Rybicki's earlier works include *Yellow Haired Girl with Spider* (March Street Press) and *Traveling at High Speeds*, which was among the first three books released by New Issues Poetry and Prose. His work has been featured in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Paris Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, *Field*, and others.

John Rybicki lectures regularly at Haverford College, Kalamazoo College, Swathmore, Interlochen Center for the Arts, Hope College, Sarah Lawrence and others. His "missionary" work involves teaching poetry writing to inner-city children in Detroit. His work there garnered him an appearance in *Time Magazine for Kids*, which featured him as an outstanding writing teacher. He also works with "Wings of Hope" Hospice teaching poetry writing to children who have been through a trauma or loss.

Rybicki has received grants from PEN/American, Academy of American Poets, American Academy of Arts and Letters, Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs, Irving S. Gilmore Emerging Artist Grant, and Carnegie Fund for authors.

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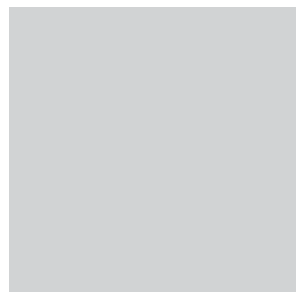
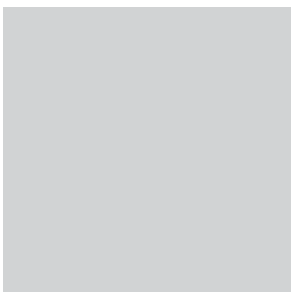
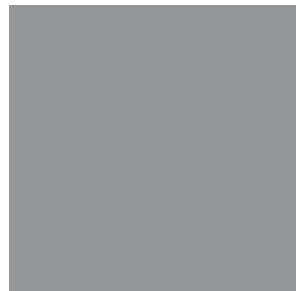
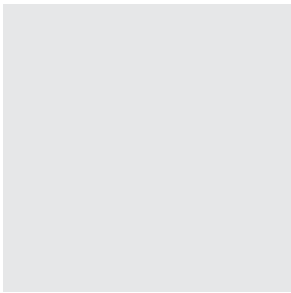
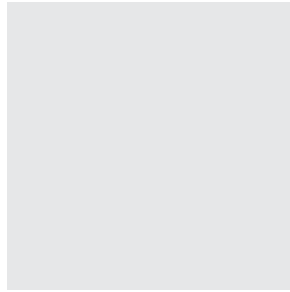
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PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual art disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College. This year's recipient is Kristine Walkowski, who is studying ceramics. She has dedicated herself to the area of ceramics and plans to continue her education at Eastern Michigan University to pursue a bachelor of fine arts in ceramics.

Her long-term goal is to teach college level art and ceramics. Kristine has a dynamic personality and easily works through the challenges she faces, including raising two children, chronic pain, managing a family business, and her college load. She carries a 3.8 GPA in spite of all her commitments.

Kristine has been an inspiration in her ceramics classes, willingly supporting the student body with demonstrations of her sculpture work. She shows a natural talent for reaching students with her openness and approachability. She is innovative and has a huge appetite for knowledge. Her works are not only unique and complicated, but they garner much attention from a wide audience base. Her mask "Fierce" as pictured in this year's *Patterns* edition was the inspiration for the edition's color scheme. Kristine spends much of her free time investigating new techniques and ideas for her projects. As she completes her associate degree and moves forward in her quest of art education, she will certainly succeed with her personality and the foundation she has acquired at St. Clair County Community College.

HENRY

Mixed Media - Stoneware

Kristine Walkowski

Kristine Walkowski's mixed media sculpture in stoneware is commonly referred to as a gargoyle. Gargoyles are historical waterspouts so Kristine's piece would actually be referred to as a grotesque or a sculpture that serves only as an ornamental and artistic piece. Her rendition of the ancient form can certainly be considered more humorous than frightening as some grotesques were meant to be. Especially when examined closely, his missing teeth and arched brow lend him a certain pet like aura that seems endearing. The monochromatic colorization lends a stone like appearance and ages the piece to resemble a medieval heritage. Her sculpting technique and use of balance in form makes this piece come alive. Every aspect, including Henry's laughable placed mole, sends radial joy to the viewer.





Sheryl Penzien's charcoal self-portrait on paper has been manipulated to produce an interesting spatial illusion that takes the viewer into an imaginary realm. The depth achieved on the canvas is done with acrylic paint and uses space and color to create movement through the portrait. This background is enhanced with the use of subtle color that does not overwhelm the piece but adds just enough interest to keep the viewer seeking a path into the mind of the subject.

Sheryl Penzien

Mixed Media

ARRANGEMENT OF SHERYL AND GREY

Second Place

11

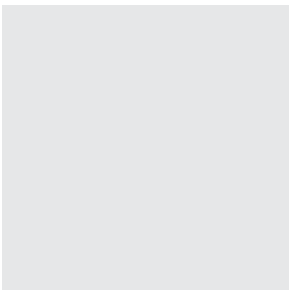
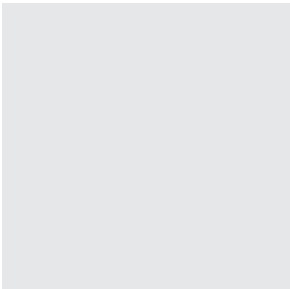
HORSE EYE

Photograph

Melissa Ahlgren

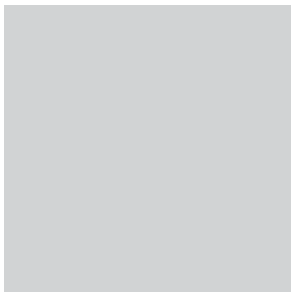
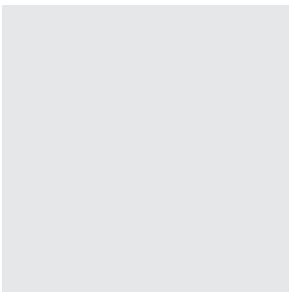
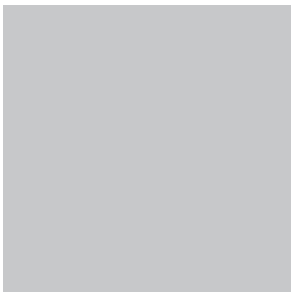
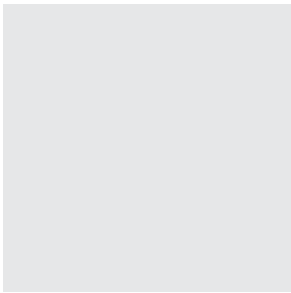
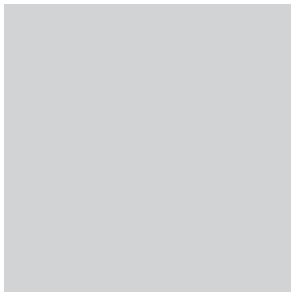
Melissa Ahlgren's focus on the horse's eye, from the eye of the camera, not only uses subject matter in an unusual application, but allows the viewer to see the intricacies of the horse's expression not otherwise noticed. By isolating the focus on the eye, the visibility of the eyelashes linear value lead the viewer to the brow and surrounding areas. The eyelashes, the fold of the brow, the depth of color saturated in the eye itself lend a viewer to connect with this animal on a personal level.





ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

For the past thirty years, the English faculty of SC4 has awarded the Eleanor Mathews Award for “outstanding creativity, technical skill, and individual style” to recognize student writers for overall achievement in creative writing. Traditionally the Mathews Award has been given to a deserving student who has had work published in *Patterns* in multiple genres and/or over a number of years. This year we are pleased to present this award to Hayley Alderman for her outstanding work in both fiction and poetry in this year’s issue.



“Thief” has a unity of perception and theme that I love. Lush imagery, an evocative premise and arresting voice can sweep us into a poem. “Thief” does that and more: there’s a heightened acuity in this writer’s observations. The heartwood of the poem moves beyond the nuances of craft to awaken us into a new way of seeing, or “an uncommon experiencing of something familiar.” Bravo.

~ John Rybicki

The fall sunrise is always a thief,
as he splinters the window of clouds
with a hesitant pick of gold
to make an entrance.
Cautiously, he shines a pale light,
until the trees and frost-masked
grass are outlines
of charcoal stenciling,
to see if anyone will stop him from
chasing away the night’s sequined stillness,
but everything is still sleeping
or commencing to sleep—
except for me.

AUGUST 21ST

Poem

Nikki Roulo

This poem starts hot and sustains in power all the way down the page. The opening line gets busy feeding our senses with crisp details while lacing into the utterance some very melodic language. This poet paints so deftly the zoom lens in the mind focuses clearly on this scene. I leave my own living room, fall through a piece of paper into brother and sister, horse and cat and hay.

~ John Rybicki

Dry cat food crumbs coat my hands
 as I hoist myself onto the tailgate
 and slip a leg over the warm side,
 as my brother reins back to catch me.
 One hand knotted in his tee shirt
 and the other Buckeye's sidling back,
 we canter past the barn cats' hedge hideout,
 through furrows of combed hay;
 a Celtic art of bronze webs slides over my face,
 as the horse hair rubs against my bare feet and knees,
 knocking against his jeaned calves and Caterpillar booted feet,
 The brick wall between us is
 my going off in two weeks—
 Our last ride together there.

Both of these poems have potent poetic mojo with enough mystery woven through them to create a powerful gravitational pull that calls me back to them, over and over. So many of the images ignite my senses to an attentiveness: I love “the horses’ breath is a raised flame of steam on my skin,” “pillars carved by horses’ teeth,” saws and hay string and barn beams, to name a few.

~ John Rybicki

The summer storm seethes
off the river, as I slip,
scurrying through rain
lashed mud with
the backpack of a hay bale
banging against my spine.
The storm lords riding
the ridges of clouds survey
the fields metamorphosed into
shallow lakes and my sludge
covered khaki shorts.
Sprinting around the faux Greek pillars
carved by horses’ teeth
supporting the lean-to,
the horses’ breath is a raised flame
of steam on my skin, as I watch
the lightening like a plated
nightlight being flicked on and off by Someone.
Time granted away
from the thunder under the house roof.

SOMETHING NEW

Short Story

Hayley Alderman

This story is perceptive and funny about teenaged girls and how they cope with excruciatingly awkward matters that are the common lot of women, like first menstruation and the clumsy paraphernalia that mothers haul out of the bathroom cupboard at such a time. Shelly, the spirited protagonist, thinks she's come up with something better, which the author wisely does not describe, although we know it involves a stapler somehow. In the course of showing us just how comically this invention doesn't work, the story offers a tender portrait of teenaged girlfriends in that brief moment when they are still as much child as woman. Of special interest in this story is the farm life in the background, never at the center of the story but as subtle as barns and manure spreaders, balers and hay mows can ever be.

~ Jaimy Gordon

Shelly sat in the bathroom, contemplating how she would raid the freezer and smuggle that new box of fudgecicles over to Tina's house without getting caught. Her elbows rested on her knees and her chin in her hands as she thought over her plan, listening to her mother staple this year's tax records together. Then she saw it. The blood.

"I don't believe it." Shelly said to herself, unconsciously covering her eyes. "Mom, come here will ya." She waited only seconds. "Mom!"

Shelly could hear her mother's pink slippers scuffing across the kitchen linoleum toward the bathroom. The door swung open.

"What?"

Shelly looked at her mother, her hair all rolled into prickly grey-black curlers held in place with what looked like several short knitting needles.

"Shelly, what do you want?" Mrs. Anderson had folded her arms across her faded blue sweatshirt and was resting her weight on one leg.

"I've got it." Shelly said.

"Got what?" Mrs. Anderson shifted her weight.

"It. You know."

"No, Shelly, I don't know."

"The Curse." Shelly said, looking away from her mother's eyes. "I'm bleeding."

"The what? Oh that." Automatically, Mrs. Anderson began digging through the tall beige cupboard, throwing old towels and half-empty bottles of shampoo out of her way. "Where'd you hear it called that, for God's sakes? You're feeling alright, aren't you? Oh, here it is." She came around the open cupboard door holding the two things Shelly needed.

"School, I heard it at school." Shelly said, staring at the white elastic belt and the box of Kotex. She watched as her mother began assembling the contraption.

"You said you were feeling okay?" Mrs. Anderson asked over her shoulder.

"Fine...Mom, that thing's as big as a diaper." Shelly's voice began to whine. Her clear, grass-green eyes were wide and they began to fill up.

"Now, Shelly, don't even. You're going to have to put up with this for a long time. You'll get used to it." Mrs. Anderson bent down to hug her daughter. She squeezed Shelly's cheeks together, giving her fish lips.

"Yeah, I know," Shelly said out of her misshapen mouth. "I can still go to Tina's today?"

"Fine by me. Business as usual as long as you feel up to it... Need any help?" Mrs.

Anderson shifted her weight and averted her eyes.

"Uh no. I got it figured." Shelly took the belt from her mother's outstretched hand.

Mrs. Anderson left the bathroom and closed the door. Shelly noticed the dent she and her brother made in it with a baseball bat last Easter. She looked at it until she let herself feel the elastic strip between her fingers.

Shelly picked up the belt with her thumb and forefinger, like forceps, and held it out in front of herself with a straight arm. "This," said Shelly flatly "is not fair."

"I can't believe nobody thought of this before!" Shelly said to herself, grinning and feeling quite inventive as she hid the belt her mother had given her in the back of the soap drawer. She tip-toed over to the kitchen table, and put the stapler back where it was between the calculator and pencil sharpener.

With her mother folding jeans in the laundry room, Shelly grabbed the box of fudgecicles, stuffed them into her backpack and headed out to the garage. Her brown Huffy could have used a little air in the tires, but there wasn't time to waste. Besides, it was hot, and she didn't want the fudgecicles to melt before she got to Tina's.

Shelly turned onto the road trying to

ignore the little pokes she felt every pedal or so. She giggled to herself; convinced her way was superior, but that last bump just before Tina's driveway proved there were some difficulties that needed to be worked out.

She spotted Tina's bike over by the big white barn. It was a midnight-blue, metal-flake Stingray. Banana seat, wheelie bar and all. 5-speed. And it was just lying there on the ground next to the manure spreader. Shelly parked her Huffy and picked up Tina's bike, leaning it on its kickstand.

"You up there, Tina?" Shelly called, straining to look up the bale chute.

"Yep. C'mon up, Shell."

Shelly climbed the ladder nailed to the wall of the chute, stopping to run her hand over the golden wood worn smooth after hundreds of bales had passed over it.

Tina sat on some loose straw near their fort. She had her hair all pulled up in a French braid, showing the lighter skin around her hairline. It was just about the only place that wasn't bronzed from the sun. Shelly wished her freckles would all smudge together in the summer so she'd get bronze like Tina, but they never did. She just got about a million more.

"Guess what?" Shelly said as she made a place for herself in the straw next to Tina. "I copped a whole box of fudgecicles." She produced them from her backpack and waved the whole sweaty box in the air with a flourish.

"We just ate." Tina said evenly. She chipped a piece of red polish off her thumbnail.

"Aw, come on." Shelly said, already licking hers. She blew the dirty blonde

bangs out of her eyes. "We can't let a whole box of these things go to waste."

"Okay, give me one." Tina bit off a corner of the fudgecicles, turning it to inspect each bite.

"I've got something to tell you." Shelly hoped Tina was ready for this.

"Yeah, what is it?" Tina stopped chewing to listen.

"I started today. Oh, it's not that bad or anything, but the equipment's a pain. I think I've got that worked out though." She patted her stomach, and one of the staples poked at her skin. "I think," she repeated.

"I know what you mean. I got mine month before last."

"You're kiddin'?" Why didn't you tell me?" Shelly tossed the stick from her first fudgecicles into the box hard and pulled out another.

"Yep. And I got a gold necklace and I'm getting a phone in my room next week." Tina smiled and put her fist to her ear pretending to hold a receiver.

"Your own phone just because you're going to bleed once a month?" Shelly's forehead filled with wrinkles.

"What'd you get?"

"My very own box of Kotex."

"Don't be funny!" Tina laughed. "I mean what else?"

"Nothing." Shelly shrugged.

"Maybe it's a family secret, and your mom's going to hide something under your pillow. Sort of like the Tooth Fairy." Tina leaned over to push on Shelly's arm.

"Maybe so," Shelly said, "but, I am not going to hold my breath."

Instantly, and as if their thoughts were one, Tina and Shelly puffed up their cheeks

and bulged out their eyes. When their faces were good and red, they both released the air and laughed till they were even redder.

When things got quiet again, Shelly opened another fudgecicle and handed one to Tina. They listened to a car go by.

"Sounds like that thing needs a tune-up." Shelly looked at Tina.

"Yeah."

"Hey, let's go play in the fort. Uh, I mean, let's go sit in there. Want to?"

"Naw," Tina said, "too hot in there."

Shelly sat watching Tina eat. "Y'know, you're the only person I know who bites their fudgecicles instead of licking them. It's just not right."

Tina focused on the brown drips on Shelly's tee shirt. "I don't like to get it all over me."

"Well, if you can't eat them right you shouldn't eat them at all. You want another one?"

"No. Hey! Let's swing on the rope." Tina was already on her feet and walking toward the edge of the mow where the big rope hung from a pulley.

"You go ahead. I'll watch." Shelly hated that rope.

"C'mon, Shell. Swing with me for once. I'll show you how." Tina ran back to Shelly and pulled on her arm.

"Tina, you've shown me a thousand times." They walked to the edge together and looked across to the other side. Shelly pointed to the straw covered floor between the two mows, then took her forefinger and ran it across her throat. "No way."

"Fine. You wanna go watch TV? Should be about time for *Dark Shadows*." Tina headed for the chute.

Shelly didn't move. "Okay. Okay. I'll try it. Just this once."

Tina pulled back on the rope, picked up her feet, and pushed her body over the floor of the barn, her feet rose in anticipation of the other side. When she reached it, she grabbed a vertical beam, turned toward Shelly, and sent the rope back to her, all in one motion.

Shelly didn't think she could even catch the rope, the way it whipped like a cow's tail. But even though she closed her eyes when she leaned out to get it, it ended up in her hand.

"Okay," Tina instructed, "Did you see how I did it? Just pull back and let go!"

Shelly didn't wait to think about it anymore. If she did, she'd never do it. So she jerked back on the rope, got a running start and shoved out across the barn.

"Put your feet down and grab this beam!" Tina hollered when Shelly swung toward her.

But Shelly couldn't let go of the rope. Her toes tried to cling to the floor of the mow, but her back swayed out, and she swung back out over the barn floor. Shelly could hear Tina laughing but couldn't see her holding her sides because her eyes were clenched shut.

Shelly just swayed back and forth. Not enough momentum to get to either side. She wrapped her legs around the rope and pinched it with her feet.

"I'm going to die." Shelly said between clenched teeth. She slowly opened her eyes and looked up through the frayed thread of rope to the pulley at the ceiling. It looked about a mile up. She didn't look down.

"Shelly, you'll have to let go. Slide down

to the end of the rope and let go. You can't hang on forever."

"Are you crazy? I'll die for sure." Shelly tightened her grip.

"I've done it a million times. Look at all that straw on the floor. You'll make it okay." Shelly just hung there.

"Okay. Okay. I'll get George, he just started working the field last week, and we'll push the empty hay wagon in. You can jump on that."

Tina was gone only seconds when Shelly's arms and legs began growing numb. She tried to let go slowly, but her muscles gave out all at once. She slid down the rope, hopelessly trying to regain her grasp all the way down.

The landing was surprisingly soft. Shelly sat in the straw motionlessly until the heat, the fudgicicles, and a low ache in her belly crept up on her. Reaching down to adjust the mechanism she'd come up with; she saw it. The blood.

"*Oh God, it didn't work.*" Her thoughts clumped together, as she scrambled to think of a camouflage method. Too late. Tina and the farm hand were already rounding the corner.

"Hey there, kiddo, I see you made it down in one piece," George congratulated her.

"It wasn't as bad as I thought." Shelly crossed her legs and looked away.

"*Come on, Shell,* you looked ridiculous flailing around up there, and just two feet from the ground." Tina laughed. "You should have seen it, George."

"Sorry I missed it..." He looked to Shelly and his smile fell, "What's wrong? Did you cut yourself? I'll go get some banda..."

"Shelly, you're bleeding!" Tina pointed.

"I know, Tina. Thanks for that." Shelly gritted her teeth. She could feel another layer of heat join the summer air.

"How did that happen? Did you fall on something?" George looked at Shelly's sunken face then up at the rope, which still swayed lazily. He opened his mouth, but stopped short, and did not look back at her.

"George." Tina scolded, "Just go."

Shelly watched as George stumbled, did an immediate about-face, and made his way back across the green grass. He glanced back toward the girls once or twice, and each time, Tina folded her arms in a stern "X" across her chest until he disappeared inside the corn crib.

Shelly's eyes met Tina's. She knew the heat in her face was betraying her. Tina looked around for a cloth or something. The barn grew still as the rope swung left to right for the last time and then hung motionlessly. Shelly stared at the dirt floor and made eights with her sneakers.

"You okay?" Tina asked.

Shelly stood mute and gazed back at Tina for awhile then inhaled quickly and twisted her mouth to blow an unruly cluster of hair out of her eyes. "I'd better go." She pushed her bike out onto the gravel road and when her front tire reached the white lilacs, the usual cue for her to look back one last time and wave, her focus stayed on her own house familiar and welcoming in the distance.

Here it is, mid October, and there's a hurricane in the gulf. That's the last fucking thing I need! Helen Prejean thought as she checked the boxes of non-perishable food, and made sure she had enough water drawn to add to the twelve gallons she got at the Piggly Wiggly on her way home from work. While she personally would have loved to get a room, say anywhere north of Alexandria, Tim made that impossible. *Why the hell didn't he stay in the hospital? If he had, they might have evacuated him to Alec, and we'd both miss the brunt of this shit. No, he had to come home. Yes, I am a nurse, but being out in the boondocks with a bed ridden invalid is not the way I want to face a hurricane.* Shaking her head to clear that thought, she checked on her husband. Tim was sleeping, oblivious to the encroaching disaster.

She tuned the TV to KPLC, channel 7, for they had the best radar of the local stations. The weatherman was being sedate, or as sedate as someone wearing a bright yellow necktie with pink flamingos on it could be. She turned off the set, turned on the radio in her bedroom, and waited for the storm to make land fall. The outer bands reached her about 10:48. *It's about twenty miles to the gulf, straight line. It's almost eleven; so by let's say two in the morning, this will be over...* she thought. The lights went out five minutes later. She had made Tim as safe and secure as possible, so she did the only thing she could do—she slept.

Morning brought no relief. If the dawn broke, Helen couldn't tell. The storm that finally hit, raged all night. She felt worn, as if the wind tossed her like the sign from the Exxon station on the corner.

She couldn't heed the evacuation warnings, thanks to Tim and the parish government. The officials forgot to check about the rural homebound invalids. Hurricane Frieda hit the one area of the gulf coast that hadn't been hit in sixty years; all the contingency plans were long out of date. The Parish got caught with their pants down, and now she was the one getting screwed for it.

Monticule, where she lived, didn't even show up on the current parish maps. The community never had many residents, and during the late-80's oil bust, most of the people drifted over toward either Lafayette, or Lake Charles, looking for work. Helen and Tim were now half the population. *Two-thirds*, she corrected, since Fred died. Mary went to her daughter Debbie's house in Basile to ride this out, and she hinted she might not come back. That would make the population two. The sheriff's department seldom patrolled these back roads. The Parish apparently didn't remember about the fly speck. The 'town' sat on the border lines of three parishes, as well as on the northern edge of the wildlife refuge, so it was easily missed.

The wind rattled the windows, even with the gray X on them. "You can tell that hurricane season is over when the decorations change to wreathes," her grandma told her as a child. This shotgun shack belonged to her great grandpa, and expanded once, but other than the running water and electricity, basically unchanged in the seventy years since the old man died. It had stood the last storm that took half the parish away over sixty years ago. It was home, had been for generations, and hopefully, more to come. Her

This is a story set in an exotic locale, Cajun Louisiana, of which its writer wisely makes full use. The story also shows us a fine ear for local dialogue, here almost a French-laced regional dialect, and a sense for the poetry of proper names: the well chosen surname is Prejean, the Deep South supermarket is Piggly Wiggly, the rural hamlet in the path of Hurricane Frieda is Monticule. A husband is too sick to move, his wife, a nurse, stays with him through the dangerous storm, feeling stuck and angry. This writer has an admirably adult view of human character: Truth and untruth, fidelity and infidelity, loyalty and disloyalty, are not pure opposites in this story, but rather admit many shades of in between, and that in a way is what the story is about: "Oh God, either take him or heal him, please? This in between is killing me," Helen Prejean thinks, as she waits for her husband to die, hoping to avert his confession of an infidelity she has secretly known about for years, and has even been complicit in. In a classic writerly trope, the phases of the hurricane they are waiting out – now violent, now eerily calm -- echo her emotions through the story.

~ Jaimy Gordon

Mick Goode

Short Story

BUT NOW I SEE

musings were cut short by a moan.

"Helen, where are you?" Tim cried in pain.

"I'm right here, calm down. What do you need, cher?"

"It seemed dark, and I didn't know where you were. Can you grab me a beer, please?"

"The doctors told me not to give you one."

"The doctors aren't here. I want a beer. I'm the sick one here."

"Tim, the doctors told me not to. They even came out to check when they set the bed up. There ain't no beer, cher, and no whiskey either. I can get you a coke, or water."

"What about coffee?"

"You can't have it, don't ask. They told me that the coffee and alcohol put you in this shape in the first place. Why didn't you want to stay at the hospital? The VA would have covered it."

"If'n I'm to get well, or die, I'm doing it at home. Them quacks don't know what they be doing. I know me better than they do. Robideaux does me better. Call the traiteur, s'il vous plait, Cherie."

"Tim, Robideaux died three years ago. That stroke scrambled your brains. Anyways, he wouldn't travel ten miles out in this storm," she replied, trying to remain calm. Right before landfall, both channels 7 and 10 both said that hopefully the front passing through would drive the storm back out into the gulf. Channel 3 said it would cause the storm to stall for a bit, then join up with front. "Looks like KATC was right."

"That's odd, they more accurate on the east end, an' we on the west end." Tim stated, as a thump echoed in the room. "What's that?"

"Probably that broke limb off the oak that you were supposed to get down three months ago." she snapped at him.

"Well, it be took care of, why are you complaining?" he coughed.

Helen crossed and grabbed a towel, patted his back to clear the obstruction, and wiped up the bloody phlegm. *His death rattle is getting worse. Oh God, either take him, or heal him, please? This in between is killing me. Amen!* "I told you to give up them cigarettes

and the beer; now they come back to finish the job."

"Water," he croaked. Helen went to the kitchen and poured a cup of water. Checking the boxes piled up, she saw several cans of meat, pork and beans, crackers, and things that didn't need to be heated up. Trying to figure what he could eat for breakfast, she heard him croak again for his water.

"It's a good thing that stroke didn't affect your speech too bad. I'd hate to guess what you thinking." she laughed, as she fed him the water.

"Cherie-bebe, I gots to told you something..." Tim said, as she moved the cup away.

"You tell me when you get better." she replied, patting his cheek lovingly. "What do you want to eat?"

"The power's out, you can't cook me nothing. I guess some beans and weenies. Nothing else out there..."

"Yes the power's out, but there're other things to eat. Are you certain that's what you want?"

"Woman, don't go argue with me. I'm trying to make it easy on you as I can. I told you what I want." he snapped. "Wait! Come see please?"

"Tim, I'm right here."

He grabbed her hand, and brought it to his lips. "I'm sorry to be such a burden on you."

"Oh Tim, you aren't a burden. I took you for better or worse, twenty-three years ago next month, and mostly that has been better. This is just the worse I signed up for. I knew it was coming, and wouldn't duck it if I could. I've loved you, Timmy, since I saw you in third grade. I figured this would happen, sooner or later. Now, let me get your food, okay?" She kissed his cheek and ran to the kitchen, so he wouldn't see her tears. She hadn't lied to him. She also hadn't told him the whole truth. She tricked him into marrying her. She convinced him that she was pregnant, and a couple of months afterwards, 'lost' the baby.

Well, ever since then, I've been mostly honest. I told him all,

except for Morgan, that is.... she thought as she fixed his food.

Dr. Morgan came on to her, just after he hired her for his office. He implied that he would get her license revoked if she didn't give in to him. He gave her a deadline, instead of a choice. She thought about it for a week and then set up a sting with a couple of other nurses that worked for him and the AMA. He wound up losing his license; she went to work at a clinic in Jennings. Tim never knew what happened, and she'd never tell him. Tim was a little over-protective of his wife. She knew his temper and didn't want to see him in jail. Others had made passes, and she turned them down politely but firmly.

She had known that he and Mary had an 'arrangement,' but that was actually made with her knowledge and consent. Fred had no problem with it. He told her that if she wanted it to stop, he'd say something, but he was happy that Mary was getting the contact he couldn't provide. Helen declined and let Tim think he was getting away with something he had no control over. It was a done deal before he was approached. In a way, it helped her too, for she was taught that all men stray; at least this way, she knew with whom, and there would be no messy scene. It also, perversely, helped their sex life stay fresh. She remained faithful to the vows, and the deal with her sister helped keep Tim faithful to her, if not the vows. *Now that he was dying, he probably wants to tell me about Mary. How do I let him know I know, without him getting upset?*

She headed back into the spare bedroom where they had set up Tim. The room seemed more cramped with the hospital bed in there. The eye of the storm finally arrived, and the calm gave her a chance to think. The sunlight streamed through the window, falling on the bed, and Tim. He looked like he aged twenty years overnight. His hair started to turn gray a couple of years ago. The 'Just for Men' boxes she found in the trash confirmed that fact, though he tried to pass it off as his mother's side of the family. His dad was gray at forty and Tim's beard had a few spots of gray. That was when he shaved it off. The stroke had slackened his face, and without the dye, he looked closer to a life-worn sixty three, than

forty three. "Tim? I got your food."

Tim turned to face her. His eyes looked tired. "Helen, I love you. I wanted to tell you that right off. You are still the same beautiful girl I married...."

She looked in the mirror. Other than a few laugh lines, her face looked the same; her body, although still trim, was beginning to lose its fight with gravity. *Thank God for Playtex, and his failing eyes. Then again, I did my best to stay in shape.* "Stop teasing me, or I'll have to crawl in there and make you stop." she laughed, as she started to feed him.

"Cherie, I mean it. I also don't think I could be convinced otherwise. I can't feel anything below my chest." he informed her, then lowered his volume and continued. "I'm dying, I know it. I won't live to see the morning. I got something to confess to you. It's about...."

"Hush, Timmy. I know about Mary. She's my sister, after all. She came to me before she tripped you up, and explained what was happening. She even had me talk to Fred, and make sure it was okay with me, before it happened; the only one you were fooling was yourself." she said soothingly. "I also know that Andrea was actually your daughter. Just rest, I forgive you of everything."

"I gotta tell you something else..." he said, around spoonfuls of beans and Vienna sausages. "Something that happened right before this...."

"Tim, there isn't anything I don't know about, or that I need to know about."

"Helen, I got to tell you some..." he started to cough again. She brought him upright, grabbing the towel to clean him up. As she cleaned his face, the eye wall passed and the rain started again. He looked into her eyes, and tried to start again. "I need to come clean about this. I'm serious about...."

"If this is about that blonde at the garage, save your breath. We've known about her since she first stopped. What made you think that we didn't, or that we'd allow it to continue? Mary talked to her right after the ambulance took you off. She admitted the

whole thing to Mary: how she came in to get her car worked on, the 'payment plan' she worked out with you, the times and dates, as well as the just how many more 'payments' there were left. How the hell could you cheat on us, the pair of us? After all these years of eating your cake and having it too, how dare you? Did you think that you could..."she sneered in his face.

"Helen, listen to me. That girl, I never fucked her. That girl is my daughter, by Mary!" Tim stated, and started coughing again. "Remember when Mary transferred to and flunked out of LSU, back when we were sophomores in high school? She never went to LSU. She went and gave birth to Ruth. That was before we started to date. It was just that one time, but she wound up pregnant, and with her so much older, and me having no way to support them, she gave Ruth up. I didn't know about that, until the girl pulled up here with a broke fan belt. Mary told me about it, after she saw us talking...."

"What? You and Mary had... is that why you started dating me, to stay close to her? What am I, the consolation prize?" Helen shrieked. He closed his eyes, and raggedly breathed, as the rain on the tin roof picked up its tempo.

"Ruth was asking about her parents. I told her most everyone moved to Lafayette. She'd find some clue, and stop back by, and ask about this or that one, and take off again. That's all there was for her to keep returning. Now, about Mary..." Tim told Helen, holding up his hand. "It was never like that. It just happened. I was crabbing, when she came up. I didn't have any luck there, so she suggested a spot further down the bayou. She took me to that place, and I had set the net, when she started to talk about you. She was asking if we had been having sex. I told her that we hadn't, which we hadn't started to, at that time. I asked her if she had. She went on about how wonderful it was, and how she thought it would be a shame if at least one of us didn't know what should be done, and how to do it. Then she started running her hands over herself, and asked if I'd seen a woman naked, and...."

Helen could see it in her mind. Thinking about how Mary had been growing up: a wild child, and a big tease; all the times they'd talk about what boys wanted; the first time in real and in fantasy, and how she kept telling Helen she would do something just for her.... Helen's attention was brought back by his latest coughing fit. "... and one thing led to another... Tim, I forgive you for that first time as well. I could see how that could happen, especially with Mary being Mary. I just want to know why you didn't tell me sooner."

"I didn't know about her, until Mary told me." Tim sat up and reached for Helen's hand. "That was after Ruth's fourth trip back. The last time Mary and I slept together. I think Fred knew about her a couple of months before we started our rendezvous. He got mad at both of us, after he found out that Andi had been conceived in a test tube, and that it was me that were her actual daddy. That, along with her getting killed, and then finding out about Ruth—all together, that is what caused him to stop being able to take care of Mary, which in turn, caused the arraignment."

"Wait a minute... you didn't know that Ruth was yours until the day of your stroke?"

"I don't think it was a stroke. Mary had been acting strange, these last few months. I don't think Fred's death was normal either." Tim croaked and sank back on the bed. "Can I have some more water, Cherie?" Helen refilled the cup, feeding it to him slowly upon her return. "Merci. After I'm gone, get an autopsy done. If anything looks strange, have them do one on Fred. I think she done gone and killed us both."

"What? What do you mean? Tim? Tim?" Helen checked Tim for a pulse, and found none. She closed his eyes and then prayed. She said a prayer for Tim and prayed for the storm to be over. After the prayers, she picked up the dishes and headed to the kitchen. Piling them in the sink, she dropped to her knees and cried.

The bumper sticker reads, “I support gay marriage if both chicks are hot.” I guess that’s uncomfortably funny, like a racist joke. I’m sure the owner of this rust bucket LeBaron genuinely agrees with the sticker. What is this thing, a ’92? Looks like it used to be white. Does it even still run? What a pile.

I can’t help myself; I have to open the door and look inside. Ugh, that’s definitely White Castle odor duking it out with Taco Bell stink. The carpet is alternatively crusty or sticky and covered in old stains. Some of the sticky spots have quarters stuck to them, and a lot of the crusty spots have empty Mountain Dew cans nearby. Oh look, empty slider and quesadilla wrappers under the seats.

I’m surprised to see the Rand McNally atlas tucked in the pocket behind the seat. Does anyone use these anymore? Then again there are lots of different fantastic fast food chains and soda companies around the country, and who doesn’t want to try them all? Uh oh, a couple is approaching, probably the owners. I retreat back to my own car, idly curious to see whether the dude’s green spiky hair will match his girlfriend’s pink locks.

Oh wow, it’s actually a busty blonde in skinny jeans and a pink blouse. She looks like she’s in her mid-twenties, tired from a long day at her frustrating job but happy to be in the company of her...girlfriend? And a mousy brunette with glasses at that. Unlike the blonde, she’s hiding in her wardrobe, using her clothes to conceal rather than accentuate her body. They’re both carrying bags of groceries and arguing about who has to cook and who has to clean up after, but it’s just playful banter. Soon it becomes who gets to cook and who gets to clean as they share a quick kiss while unloading the bags in their trunk. They smile and wave at me as they drive away. I smile back, wondering if the sticker is any less offensive just because they’re two women in love.

This short short, a riff on an un-PC bumper sticker that turns out to be an unreliable predictor of both the sexual orientation and the probable politics of the owners of the car that bears it, is a short sweet dose of tonic against prejudice of any kind.
~ Jaimy Gordon

RAT PACK

Essay

Aaron Smith

I like everything about this witty, instructive and poignant essay. First, this writer can write: I mean, he has a lot to offer on stylistic grounds alone, with his savvy choice of word and phrase and the way he puts sentences together. The description of rat after rat is detailed, vivid and amazingly distinct. Second, the writer teaches me far more about rats than I thought I wanted to know, but always as an aside, in the course of the action, never by frontally explaining things to me. Third, he keeps me hanging, but also smiling, with deftly deployed ironic suspense throughout the essay, using lines like: "How difficult could four rodents be?" and, "I was confident they were unable to escape," to hook me in. The rats, especially Norbert and the Brain, become fully developed characters I won't soon forget. And finally the writer quietly becomes an interesting character in his own essay too, because of the quality of the observation he bestows on his rats and the feeling he develops for them, to our surprise and his own.

~ Jaimy Gordon

It was the end of the "build an ecosystem in a box and hope it doesn't fail or you fail" project for Advanced Biology II, and all four of us still had our lab rats. However, the teacher and my classmates had no interest in maintaining four tiny, modest rodent lives any longer. Infused with the sense of righteous indignation all high school seniors seem to possess when not completely overpowered by apathy, I decided these rats deserved a better fate than whatever disposal method Mrs. Rockwell had in mind. Rats only live a couple years and they were nearly a year old anyway, so how difficult could four rodents be?

Mid 90's cartoons are the best cartoons ever made, so I named two of the rats Pinky and the Brain right away. I cheated with the other two and named them after The Angry Beavers, Norbert and Daggett. Pinky was pretty different from his famous counterpart. He was thin, fairly small, and all black fur, except for the naked fleshy tail and white splotch on the neck called

the "milk band," which I learned all domestic rats have. His demeanor was austere as a rat can be. If he was a person, he'd be the old man telling you how much better things used to be back in his day. Brain was timid but a total sweetheart, and his uniformly dun-colored fur seemed to mirror that. He was one of the smartest ones and the only one who learned to crawl into my hand when I called his name. Daggett was mostly white with a tan "hood," playful, and an absolute blast to watch as he scampered about with boundless energy, but he didn't live very long after I took him home. And then there was Norbert.

Norbert was the group's unholy terror. His fur was a sort of dirty off-white, but the eyes were by far his most distinctive feature. At a glance they were just black beads like any of the others', but if you looked for more than a few seconds you could tell he was glaring at you and plotting. I was amazed what a vicious little monster he turned out to be since he was so

docile with Kristen, the girl who built his ecosystem in Biology. She never got bit once, whereas with me, Norbert seemed to tear at my fingers with all the subtlety of a heat-seeking missile. Sometimes he'd pretend to be asleep in the scarlet plastic castle I bought for their cage and then streak out like a wicked flash of white lightning to rend my flesh if I put my hand in the cage. When he had his babies, I was surprised he didn't eat any of them. Rats aren't known for that like gerbils or hamsters, but infanticide did not seem beyond Norbert.

One morning around six a.m., I heard very frantic squeaking and rustling coming from the cage. I blearily peered in and saw Pinky moving three little blobs around, desperately trying to keep them away from the other rats. I dismissed it as a dream and fell asleep again. When I woke up properly a couple hours later, I saw Norbert and Brain keeping their distance from the green chube (a large chewable tube in which the three of them normally

loved to huddle together) in the corner of the cage. I peered inside and saw Pinky moving three little blobs around that looked like shrunken, misshapen peaches. When he saw me looking, he quickly moved them to the other end of the chube further away from me. That's when I knew he was a she, and she was a new mom.

I couldn't really do anything about their living situation that day. When I awoke the next morning, I sat up in bed and locked eyes with Pinky, sitting on top of her cage staring at me. Three babies lighter, she was now thin enough to squeeze through the top bars to give me a look that said, in volumes, how inappropriate she thought it was that she had to raise three kids with two adult roommates. I quickly went out and bought her a smaller cage for her new family, not even thinking until she'd settled in with her babies that I was now up to six rats. A little Internet research told me I was lucky because the average litter size is seven and can sometimes reach the teens. When I told Mrs. Rockwell what happened, she swore the pet store told her that she purchased only male rats. When I asked the pet store employee in the small mammals department if she knew anything about raising rats, she confided that she hated them and usually said whatever a potential

customer wanted to hear in order to move them out of the store.

Still, six wasn't much more than four, and watching the babies grow up seemed worth it. As long as there were no more, it wasn't a big deal. About a week later, I came home from school to find Norbert furiously trying to grab several objects and shove them underneath his body while Brain trembled as far away as possible in the corner. At first I thought the objects were peanuts, which Norbert loved like crack and fought tooth and nail to keep all to himself. But he wasn't eating any of them, and he looked very distressed. I noticed a couple had fallen between the bottom cage bars into the droppings tray and that Norbert was stretching his rat-arms to try to grab them while still keeping the others precariously balanced beneath his body. That's when I realized how fuzzy and squirming the peanuts were, and Norbert became Norberta.

I knew from a little research after Pinky's babies that if a baby rat doesn't get some of its mother's milk right away, the immune system doesn't activate and the baby dies within minutes. The "milk band" on the underside of the neck is the proof that the baby got the milk in time. That's why Norberta was so desperate to get to her fallen babies; they probably

hadn't gotten the milk yet. I grabbed a shoe box and put Norberta in it, receiving several bites for my trouble. As I placed each baby in the box, she used those wicked teeth which so frequently tore open my skin to tenderly tuck her babies beneath her and ensure they got her milk. Despite not losing a single one of her eight babies, her malicious glare told me she considered the whole fiasco to be my fault.

Many of the rats had little quirks and personality traits. There was Remy, who tried to carry as many Cheerios as possible in his mouth and rat-hands. Ginger's coat was a beautiful blend of rich, rusty red and dark brown. Her fur matched my dog May's almost exactly, and May decided to adopt Ginger as her little sister. Every day May would come into my room, stare at the girls' cage, and whine until Gingle would stick her snout through the wire lattice. Both their noses would twitch as they sniffed each other, then May would walk away, tail wagging in satisfaction. Hooded Justice was named for her distinctive mahogany fur from her neck up through her face, contrasting with her otherwise pure white coat. Whenever I opened the girls' cage, she'd climb out, jump into the boys' cage, and start eating their Cheerios, despite all the males being twice her size. Her flirtation visitations helped me

realize that Norberta was a misandrist, counterpart to a misogynist. Norberta never attacked any females except for Hooded Justice after one of her excursions, and I figured it was probably because she smelled like the boys. From then on, whenever I needed to pick up Norberta but feared her teeth, I'd tell her Buffy was the greatest show of all time, or Wonder Woman was the more interesting version of Superman, or Storm was a better leader of the X-Men than Cyclops. This seemed to please her. Sometimes. Ophelia was a dusty brown, slim little girl who always seemed a little too thin and not quite all there. One night she scampered out of her cage as I was feeding the ladies and proceeded to climb down my dresser and jump off the landing down the staircase. She was six inches long, and it was a five foot drop, so that would be like me falling around fifty feet. I crept down the dark staircase, dreading equally the sickening squelch that would mean I stepped on her, the pitiful squeaks and low snarls that would mean our cat, Tuna, found her first, or having to bury her broken body in the middle of the night. The first ten steps seemed to stretch on forever with no sign of her, and I finally reached the light switch. There she was on the eleventh step, miraculously unharmed albeit clearly

shaken. Since the staircase was completely dark, she probably didn't know she was essentially jumping off a cliff, but it's possible she was as suicidal as her namesake. Regardless, her spirit of adventure never showed itself again.

In Mrs. Rockwell's next class, Nikki agreed to take home two of the four lab rats while I took the other two. Nikkie wasn't really prepared to care for Simon and Garfunkel, and Simon ended up escaping. I took Garfunkel off her hands, renaming him Funky so he could start his life over properly. This brought me up to nine females and seven males, which I was able to tell thanks to helpful Internet articles with helpful diagrams such as "this is a penis" and "these are the male rat's massive testacies." They were sorted into two large cages separated by gender. The girls were much smaller than the boys and could easily slip through the bars of any conventional rodent cage, so I got a mini chicken coop with lots of small, thin wires forming an inescapable lattice of containment. I even reinforced the only weak point, the latch in the cage ceiling, with a bungee cord holding it shut. I was confident they were unable to escape.

The first of their many escapes was a lesson in not underestimating

rat intelligence. All nine of the girls held on with their rat-hands to several wires surrounding the hatch and hung suspended from the cage's ceiling. I watched as their combined weight pulled the ceiling just far enough away from the hatch for one to slip through. Norberta, self-elected empress of the horde and no doubt the coordinator of this well-synchronized maneuver, popped out and glowered at me defiantly. She didn't try to run or resist when I picked her up and put her back inside the cage. I think she just wanted me to know that I was stupid and she was smart. After that I had to put a heavy book on the latch, and Norberta made sure to chew on any part she could reach.

The boys were much subtler in their escapes. For a while, whenever I did a head count, there was always one boy missing, a different one each time. I'd always find and re-cage him relatively quickly, but for the life of me I couldn't figure out how it was happening. One morning I heard my sister screeching, "Rat! Rat in my roooooom!" Sure enough, there was Brain, cowering under her dresser, more terrified than she was. He crawled onto my hand once I reached for him and called his name, which gave me an idea. I re-caged him and started calling his name again. He tried to climb out the

hatch, confused when he found it was securely in place. Then he waddled to a particular bar in the cage wall, carefully pulled it back with his rat-hands, and squeezed out the new opening. Two of the other boys scampered over and pushed the bar back into place. Evidently, they had worked together on loosening one bar over time and made sure to cover for each other's escapes so that each boy got his turn to explore the wide world. Not really sure what to do, I bought another cage and hoped it wouldn't happen again. It didn't, so Brain must have been last in the vacation rotation.

I was surprised how quiet rats are. I think some of them went their entire lives without ever making a squeak. Instead, all the rats loved to climb the walls of their respective cages at all hours of the day and night. Sometimes they even climbed across their cage ceilings using just their rat hands, suspended two feet from the cage floor like kids on monkey bars. Pinky's favorite pastime was climbing to the top of one of the cage walls and staring and sniffing out the window. Another surprising discovery was they loved off-brand Cheerios. I was tired of buying expensive rat food and decided to try making my own by buying lots of things at the grocery store and mixing them all together. Without fail,

after peanuts, the fake Cheerios were the first things to go. When I found out peanuts damage rodent livers, I went exclusively with cereal. They didn't like Honey Nut Cheerios, Frosted Cheerios, Froot Loops, or even brand name Cheerios, just regular knock-off Cheerios in the bulk-sized bags.

Watching my rats pass away was more difficult than I thought it would be. It took a while for May to realize that Ginger wasn't just hiding from her, and I'm not sure she ever understood what happened to her little sister. Most of the rats died peacefully in their sleep, but Funky got some horribly crippling disease that slowly made his rat-hands more and more worthless. His front legs retracted further and further toward his chest until they were as useless as a T-Rex's arms. With nothing to support his front half, he had to propel himself with his back legs while his face dragged on the ground. Remy carried Cheerios to him every day, and eventually I had to start dropping water into his mouth with an eye-dropper. Finally his jaw locked too, and the water just dropped onto his emaciated face, covering it in liquid beads. Remy rushed over and lapped all the water off his adopted brother, and I let the two of them spend Funky's final hours alone. Norberta outlived most of her children, coming back

from the brink more than once just to spite the probably-male angel of death. She died on the most frigid day of the year, and I could only bury her in the biggest snow drift I could find. When spring came, I looked for her body to bury it properly, but it was gone. I'm convinced she's a zombie roaming the world looking for men to bite. Hooded Justice kept visiting the boys even when her hood was more grey than brown, until one day she jumped up on her cage and saw the other one was devoid of both Cheerios and gentlemen callers. She didn't wake up the next morning.

Eventually the only thing left was a couple bags of fake Cheerios. The cages were cleaned one last time and shoved them in the attic, another bittersweet memory. I still can't quite part with them. Maybe someone I know will quadruple on a lab rat investment.

YOUNG AND STUPID

Essay

Michael Scott

Unrestrained candor will get you far, in an autobiographical essay, and we can guess from the title of “Young and Stupid” that the author is not going to spare himself, so we settle in with high expectations for the ride. The author has considerable descriptive gifts and an ear for dialogue. Even though we fully agree that the author’s younger self and his friends are fools, he nevertheless makes us feel some sympathy for them behind the veneer of toughness and sarcasm which so quickly breaks down once they’re in trouble. Even more to his credit, he makes us feel something for the tired, harassed border officials on the other side.

~ Jaimy Gordon

I am walking through the doors below a sign that reads, “U.S. Customs and Immigration.” I have been here many times, as I have been a frequent visitor to the great nation of Canada. I am a young punk, so young and oblivious to the reality of the world. I couldn’t care less about anything other than where I will be partying the next night.

It’s 4 o’clock in the morning and I am accompanied by two of my friends and the harsh stench of liquor and booze. I smell as if I had just returned from a tour of the sea with Captain Morgan, as well as his female companion: Mary Jane.

We walk to the counter like a bunch of bad asses, looking like something straight out of the Reservoir Dogs. Behind the counter stands an immigration officer who looks as if he has been there for hours and is in no mood whatsoever to deal with our shit. Skinny, angry, and pointy nosed, he asks us for our identification. We toss it on the table. Over the next ten minutes he tediously runs our names through a computer system. He is doing background checks on us and cross referencing our names, looking for alias’ or other hints that might lead him to believe that we are criminally inclined, or in fact a group of terrorists intending to perform harm to the United States of America. However, we are neither of the two aforementioned. We are just a couple of young kids who like to get drunk and seek meaningless, thoughtless, and emotionless sex with the women of our neighbors to the north.

After a while, he asks us to empty our pockets. Suddenly, pushing its way through all the hops and THX, my conscience hits me. I feel as if I had just been hit in the head with a sledge hammer. Straight out of a WWF pay per view, I have just realized that I am in fact only eighteen years old and I have just given this super-cop my fake ID.

My name is Michael Scott. The immigration officer thinks I am Tucker Reno. Feeling a sense of guilt and realizing I was in the wrong, I fess up to what I had just done. I tell him. He just stares at me with utter disgust. Looking at me dead in the eye, he informs me that I have just committed identity fraud. Like the jackass that I am on this cold, windy, November night, I blurt out the words, “is that bad?” He is in no joking mood and I realize that I am in it thick now.

Quickly, three other overweight officials grab us and take us into an interrogation room, like something of the same nature as you would see in an FBI film. I feel like a drunken idiot. Luckily, they do not strip search us or perform a colon check. Whew, that was close. I have yet to make my headlining appearance in an adult film. They badger us with questions of our intentions, asking about our previous activities that night. Blatantly, the shorter one to my left gets in my face asks me where is the weed. I tell him I don’t have any.

He moves to my friend on the right: same question. Moving further to the right he looks at my other friend. Hoping indeed that the third time will be the charm, he asks

the question. The tough guy response my friend Cody gives him is simply, "I smoked it all." After a few more questions and twenty more minutes of inspecting our vehicle, they ponder what to do. They call the Port Huron Police and officially turn the case over to the local authorities.

Starsky and Hutch: the boys in blue, walk into the office quickly like they are about to be late for an officer convention at Dunkin' Donuts. They get the up and up on we three drunken friends. They discuss quietly between themselves for a moment. I hear the one officer whisper, asking his partner what he wants to do. He has just asked them if he wants to process us or let us go. My heart jumps. I am hoping for the latter option. Then with a crushing blow, the nerdy cop laughs and smiles, and clearly and loudly says, "Let's process them."

I guess there is no convention for these two tonight. They handcuff us and read us our Miranda rights. Click. Snap. One cuff is tight. I hear the snap again. The other cuff is on. I am a prisoner headed for the brig.

I have large shoulders and the officer asks me if I'd like another set. I tell him no. They walk us out to their vehicle and throw us in the back seat. I feel like America's most wanted man.

Slowly passing through town I see restaurants, buildings, and car dealerships. There goes Pine Grove McDonalds. It is open twenty-four hours and I have the munchies. Too bad, maybe I will stop by when I am out of jail! We drive and drive. The street lamps are dim and the sky is black. The moonlight shines down to give off an eerie, mystic look to the setting. It is like when the movies go quiet and some calm, light, sad song plays for a few minutes to add dramatic effect.

I see the river and realize we are close to the police station.

Once a tough guy who had the world by the balls, I am now crying like a little girl who didn't get the right flavor of ice cream she wanted. My best friend is to the right of me. He looks at me. He is a young black male; moreover this is not his first run in with the law. That is not a racist thought, but, yes, a supported truthful thought. For I have heard the battle stories.

Looking directly at me to show his support as a friend, he grumbles harshly and motions as if he is clenching a fist. He then spills out the words, "Be a rock." I smile and turn the other way; next, one thought pops into my head.

My mom and dad are going to kill me....

ANGEL RESCUE

Essay

Sandra Jaros

The author of this essay saw a tragic shooting with her own eyes, and what's more, she was personally acquainted with both the shooter and the victim. The experience was indeed a gift of God, and not only because the writer was fortunate enough to escape injury or death when she and some others bravely went to the victim's rescue. We Americans like to read about violence, in part because we genuinely want to understand violence better, and this writer had a God-given opportunity to help us do that. She does a fine job with the victim's and the rescuers' side of the incident, and I was grateful for the astonishing detail about the ambulance being banned from the scene, as the police chief lies bleeding to death, because the shooter is still on the loose. I still wonder why she didn't tell us more about the shooter – who he was and why he did it.

~ Jaimy Gordon

“He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.”

-- NIV Bible, Psalms 91.15

This verse of the Bible has been a favorite of mine for many years, but never more so than on the day of April 16, 2008, when tragedy struck my neighborhood in the small Village of Capac, Michigan. Although the events of this day were extraordinary, it only took a group of ordinary people, and a little faith, to affect the end result.

It was a sunny, but cool, crisp day that started out in the ordinary way: My son, Benjamin, was off to school, and my husband, Karl, had left for work. But I had the day off, and I wasted no time getting started cleaning Benjamin's closet in search of any items we could sell at our upcoming garage sale. A few hours later, I decided that I had better leave for the grocery store, so I would be sure to get back in time to pick up Benjamin after school at 2:50 p.m.

Turning onto Mill Street on the way back from grocery shopping, I checked the clock on the dash of our minivan—1:38 p.m. Being only a few blocks from home, I was pleased that

I would be home with time to spare. I thought of a craft project that I wanted to finish and decided that I would work on it until it was time to go pick up Benjamin. After unloading the groceries and starting a load of laundry, I sat down on the living room floor in front of the picture window, which faces the street in the front of the house. I watched TV as I worked on the craft, which involved cutting foam letters for Benjamin's room. The sun coming through the window was warm and relaxing. It wasn't long, though, before the peacefulness of the day turned chaotic.

Suddenly, there was a loud “bang!” on the house. It startled me, and before I could even finish my cut and get to the window to look, it happened again, another loud bang on the house. Puzzled, I stood up to look out the picture window at the house to see if I could tell what had hit it. Immediately, my eye was drawn to movement across the street. I could see my neighbor, Don, on his front porch. He had a gun drawn up to his shoulder, a rifle, aimed towards his driveway where the Capac Police Chief was, in between his squad car and a tow truck. I looked

just in time to see Chief Hawks, who was facing away from Don, fall lifeless to the ground. I gasped at what I had just seen. Anger welled up inside me and I knew I had to help Chief Hawks. Not knowing if he was dead or alive, I headed towards my front door.

Scrambling as fast as I could, my hand touched the doorknob, and for a split second a wave of sadness enveloped me as thoughts of Benjamin and Karl flooded my mind. I knew it was dangerous outside, and the thought of never seeing them again was too much to bear. I looked up as I headed out the door, and there it was on the wall: “Psalm: 91.” Not the verse written out; just a plaque on my wall with the letters and numbers identifying the scripture. But I knew what that scripture meant. I whispered, “Jesus,” and headed out the door.

Don was not on the porch anymore and no shots were being fired. Chief Hawks was lying on the pavement in between his squad car and the tow truck, crying out in pain. A chilling sound to be sure, but at least I knew that he was still alive. Monica and Bill, who lived next door to Don, had just gotten to Chief Hawks' side on his

right, and Mike, the tow truck driver, was on his left. I stayed low as I hurried through the front lawn and across the street, not knowing if Don would return outside with the gun. Once there, I knelt down by Chief Hawks' head, placed my hand on his face, and reassured him that everything was going to be all right. Soon, another neighbor, Andy, also came to help. We all stayed behind the squad car taking cover while we attempted to determine the extent of Chief Hawks' injuries, ever mindful and watching for Don. At one point Chief Hawks asked for his phone, which was in his squad car. Mike, crouching low, reached in the car and retrieved it for him. Chief Hawks was severely injured and struggling to breathe, yet he radioed dispatch and reported the shooting. The dispatch operator knew who he was and assured him that they were on their way. Chief Hawks urged them to hurry, saying, "*I'm dying!*" The operator told him to hang on, and they would be there as soon as possible.

In the meantime, we were rushing to find the wound. Chief Hawks' shirt was covered in blood, especially red against the white uniform shirt he was wearing. We knew we had to stop the bleeding, but couldn't see where it was all coming from. We could see where he had been hit in the right forearm, but he was not bleeding from there. Monica tried to rip his shirt so we could see more, but the material was too thick to tear. Bill quickly ran inside their house and brought back scissors, which

Monica then used to cut it. I lifted up his arm, and we could now see that the bullet had burned right through his arm and entered into the side of his chest. I quickly ran back to my house and grabbed a towel to help stop the bleeding. It seemed like hours had gone by and still no ambulance.

I continued to try my best to keep Chief Hawks calm, but he was understandably anxious. Besides the difficulty breathing, the pain he was enduring was unbearable, and he was sure he was going to die. Although he struggled to talk, he insisted on calling his wife, Vickie. I told him that he needed to save his breath, but he insisted, saying that he needed to tell her that he loved her. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I looked at Mike who had his phone from earlier. Mike dialed the phone as Chief Hawks instructed and then handed it to him. With his voice growing weaker, he spoke with Vickie for a moment, but it was struggle for him to explain everything to her because of his injuries. I interrupted and told Chief Hawks that I would talk to her for him. He agreed and handed me the phone, which I gently slid from his hand, not wanting to cause him any more pain. Once I had explained to Vickie what was going on, she immediately said that she was on her way.

We had been in contact with dispatch and knew that help was coming, but we couldn't understand why it was taking so long. It had been approximately 25

minutes since Chief Hawks had been shot, and every one of them seemed like an eternity. Except for us, the street was eerily quiet and still. There was no traffic, no noises, and thankfully, no Don. Bill had seen him once looking at us from behind his curtain in his front window, but he had not come back out on the porch or fired any more shots...so far. Still kneeling by Chief Hawks, I looked down the street to my left and noticed a Sheriff patrol car at the corner. The glare of the sun on the windshield blocked the view of the inside of the car, so I couldn't see if anyone was there or not. Mike and Bill had both been on the phone with dispatch during this time to see what was taking them so long. Suddenly, I heard someone say, "*They're not coming.*" I froze for an instant and my heart sank. At least we finally knew why the ambulance hadn't arrived yet: they were waiting for clearance from law enforcement. In other words, because Don was still a threat, the ambulance was not allowed on the scene. Although we were upset that this hadn't been explained to us sooner, all that mattered now was getting Chief Hawks out of there and to the hospital. Just then, I heard a noise to my right and saw a car racing up to the scene: it was Vickie. I could hear the grinding of the transmission as she threw it into park before she had come to a complete stop. She flew out of her vehicle, not pausing even long enough to turn it off, and ran to her husband's

side. I motioned and called to her to stay low, but she was focused only on helping him. Not even police protocol could keep her away.

Even considering the best efforts of the Police Department, we knew that it could be an infinite amount of time before Don was apprehended. Chief Hawks just couldn't wait any longer; we had to get him medical attention—*fast*. If the ambulance could not get to him, then he would have to get to the ambulance. After a failed attempt to load him into the back of the squad car (his body was lifeless and difficult to maneuver), Mike quickly thought of his tow truck. He jumped inside, moved it around, and lowered the flatbed. Then he, along with Andy and Bill, slid Chief Hawks onto it. Vickie climbed up on the flatbed with her husband, shielding his body with her own. Andy also climbed on, and having taken possession of Chief Hawks' gun, guarded them as Mike drove them quickly out of the neighborhood. Knowing that Benjamin would be out of school soon, I stayed behind, as did Monica and Bill. I watched the tow truck as it sped away, so thankful that Chief Hawks would soon get the medical attention he needed, and hoping that Don wouldn't try to take another shot at them on the way out. Then Andy, from the back of the flatbed, yelled out, "*Get back in the house!*" He didn't need to say it twice; I ran back home as quickly as I could.

Chief Hawks survived the shooting, despite the damage it caused to his lungs, liver, and kidneys. I learned later

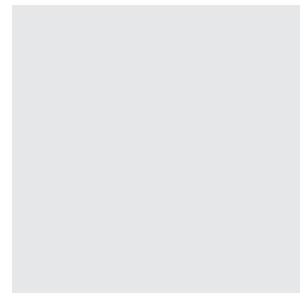
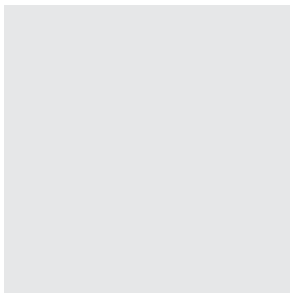
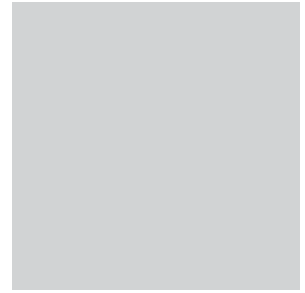
that the Sheriff's Deputy, whose car I had seen on the street that day, was there because he had also been shot by Don as he was driving towards the house to assist Chief Hawks. (Don had been driving recklessly through town that day, and they were going to impound his car.) Though he was shot in the head while still in his squad car, the deputy bravely managed to call the incident in to dispatch. He fully recovered and was able to return to work. Mike's tow truck has several bullet holes in the cab, inches from where his head was as he sat in his truck. All were very fortunate to survive that day. Don was found and apprehended early the next morning in a truck parked at a local produce business a few blocks away. His trial took place several months later, in October, 2008. He was found guilty and sentenced to over thirty years in prison. Although Chief Hawks was not able to return to his job, he is very grateful just to be alive. As soon as he was well enough, he gave each of us (Monica, Bill, Vickie, Mike, Andy, and myself) an award and lovingly dubbed us his "Angels" for helping him that day. Later, we also received awards from the American Police Hall of Fame, and the Michigan Sheriff's Association honored each of us with a Medal of Valor. Chief Hawks credited us, along with the doctors and paramedics, with saving his life. But I know there was more to it than that. When ordinary people work together—with a little faith—extraordinary things happen. The dent

in my storm door where a bullet hit it, and the awards I received for what we did, are silent reminders of the events of that day, and the reality of Psalm 91 in my life.

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Thomas Cartier

Pen and Ink

9:30

Honorable Mention

39

RAKU PYRAMID BOX

Stoneware

Caitlyn Wallace





FIERCE

*Mixed Media - Stoneware**Kristine Walkowski*



Elisabeth Peters

Digital Media - Adobe Photoshop

THE BURTON APOCALYPSE

WALL POCKET

Ceramic

Elizabeth Ullenbruch





Larry Lonsby

Ceramic

SERPENT'S LAIR

Selection of Merit

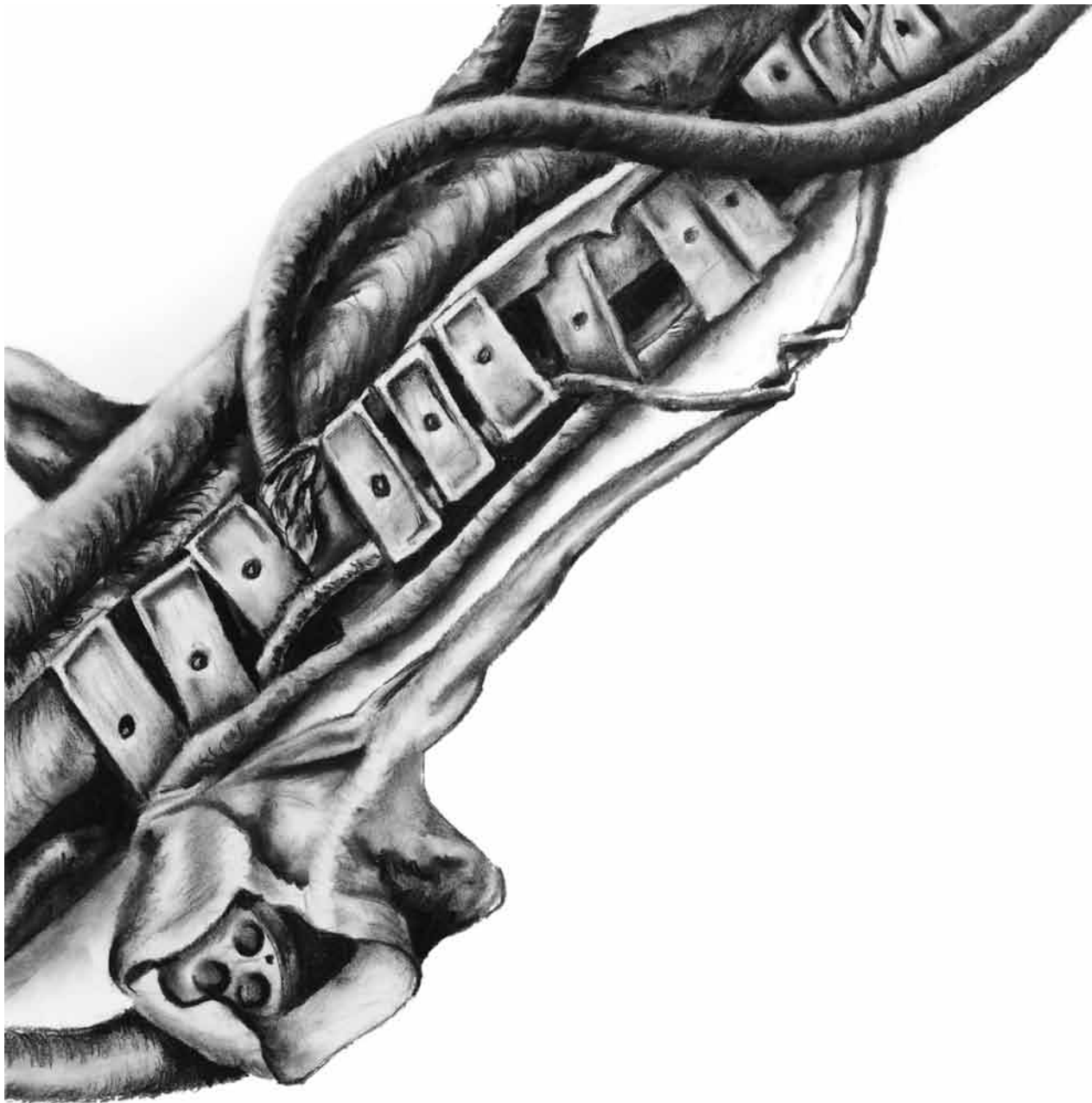
45

A LITTLE LEG

White Charcoal Pastel

Cheyenne LaBelle





Samantha Segnitz

Charcoal

INTERPRETING TOM

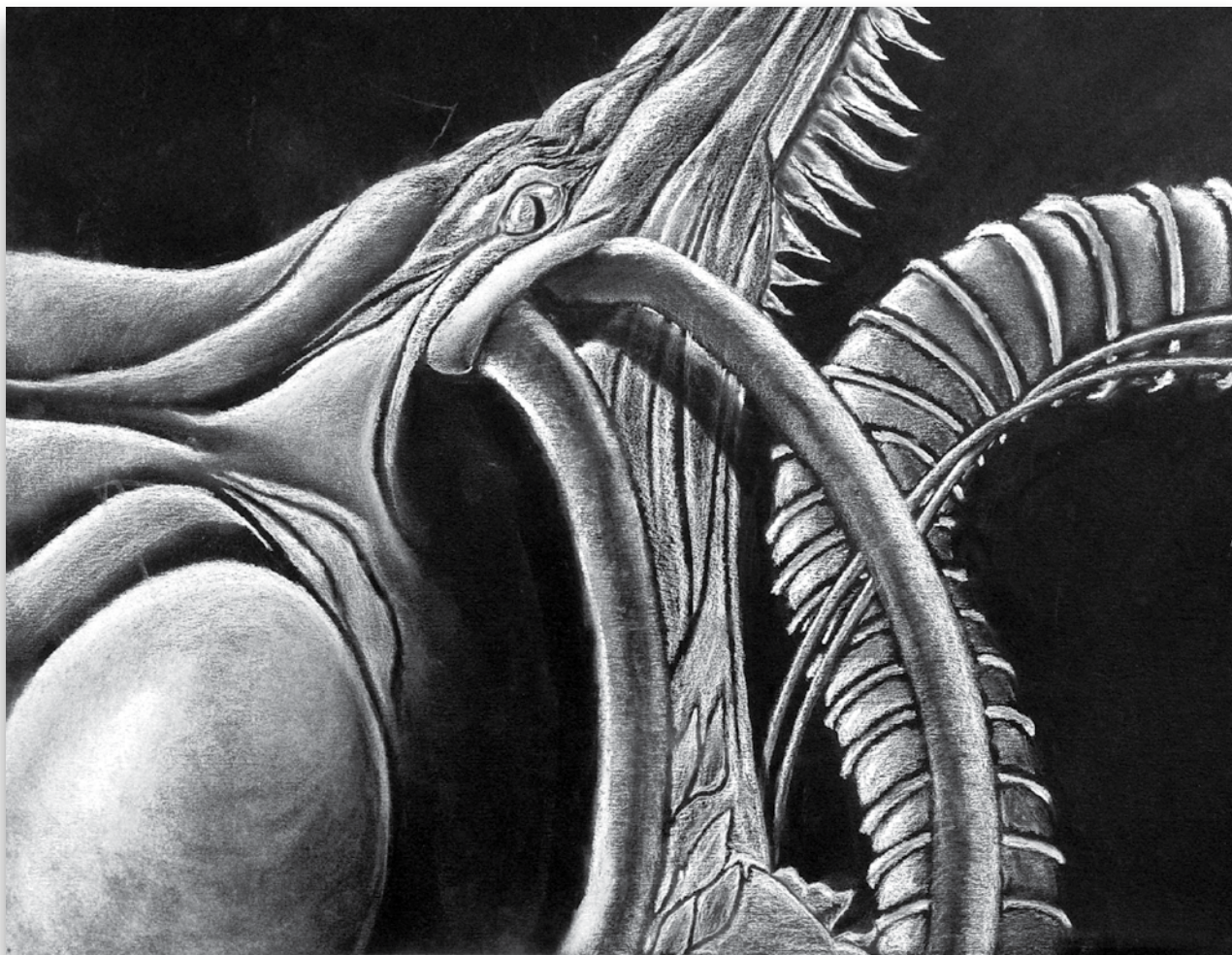
Selection of Merit

WAITING

White Charcoal Pastel

Cheyenne LaBelle





Betsy Vollmar

White Charcoal Pastel

ALPHONZ

Selection of Merit

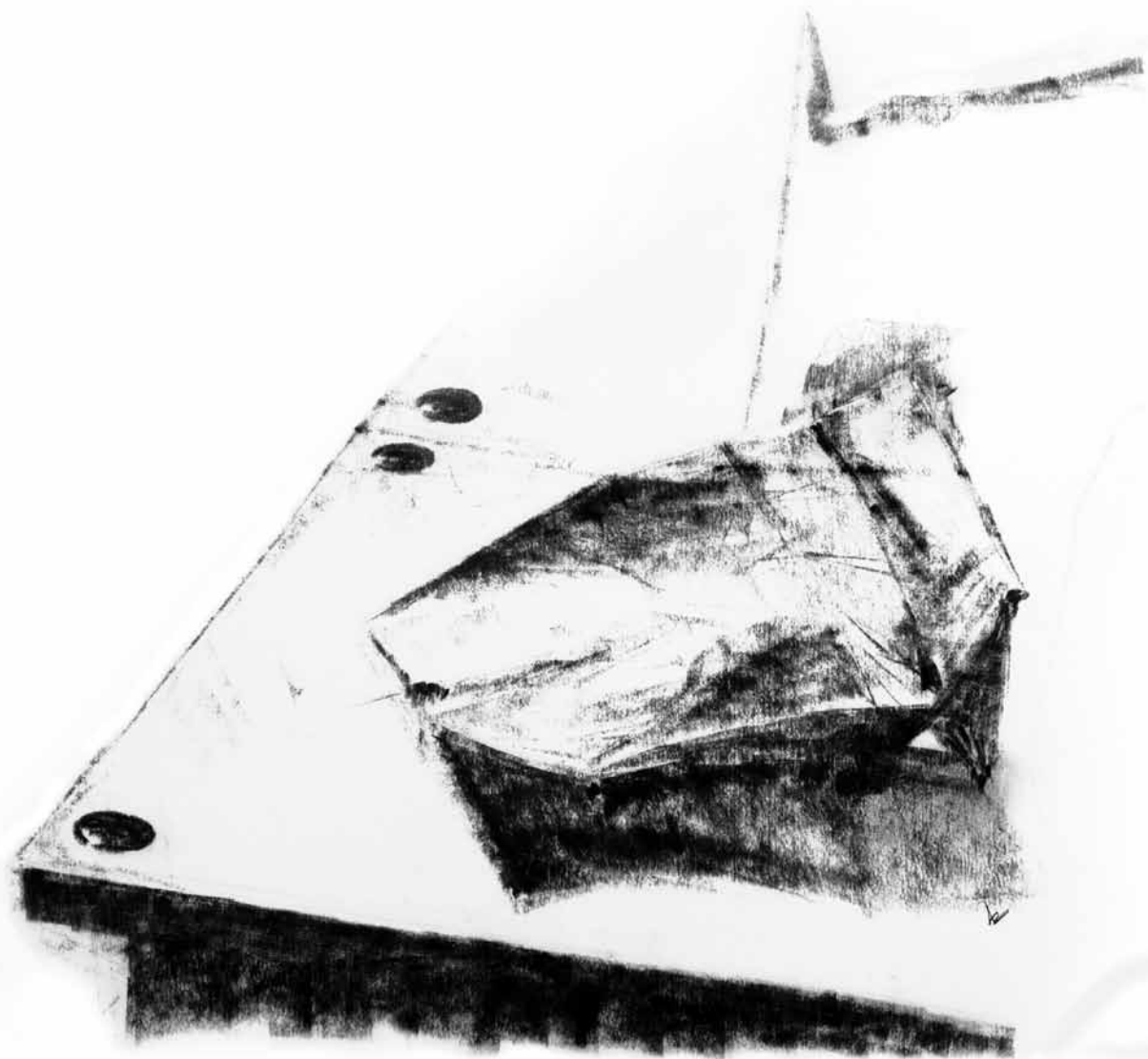
“NO LONGER IN AMERICA”

Ceramic Chain with Hooks

Ceramic

Mark Brant





Adam Robinson

Charcoal

BAG OF SHADOWS

Selection of Merit

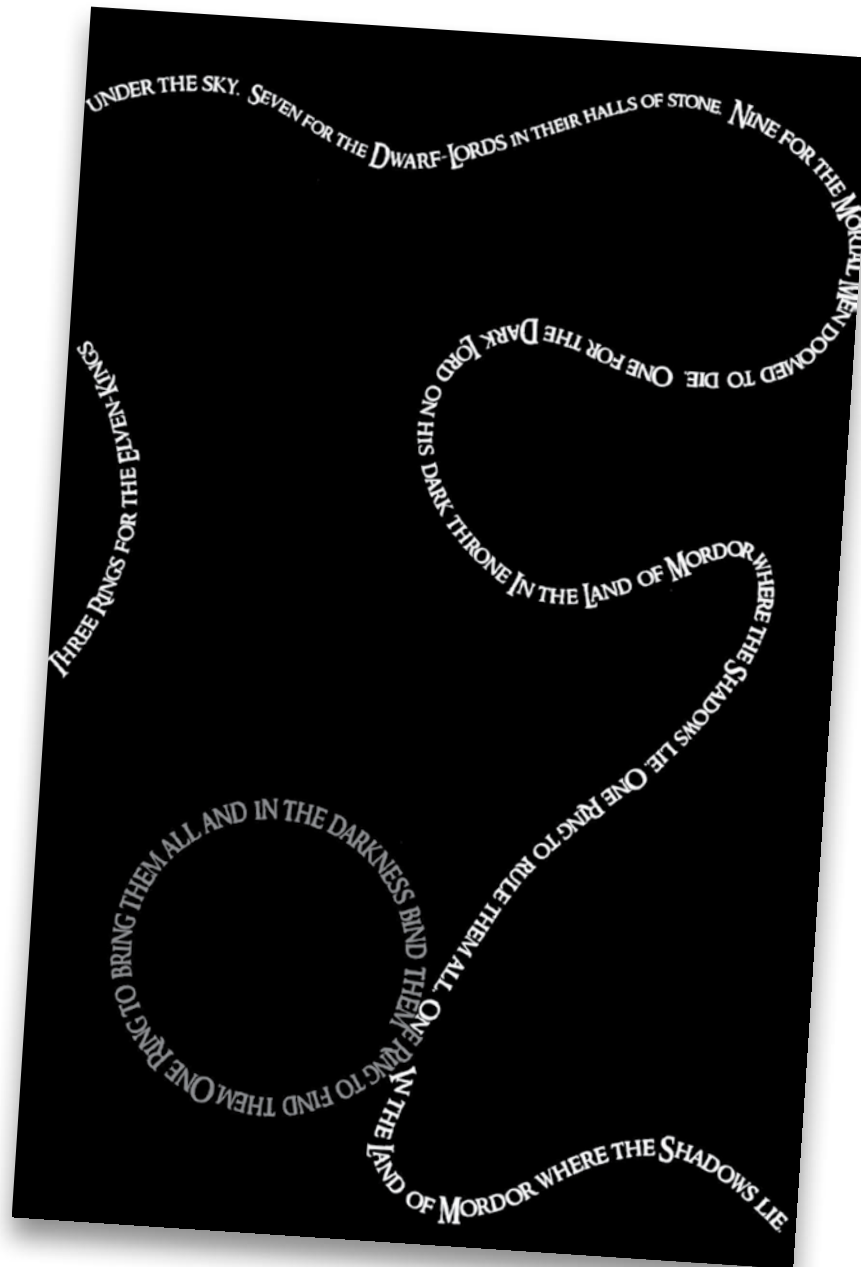
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MIRAGE OF ZEON

Digital Media - Adobe InDesign

Douglas Johnson



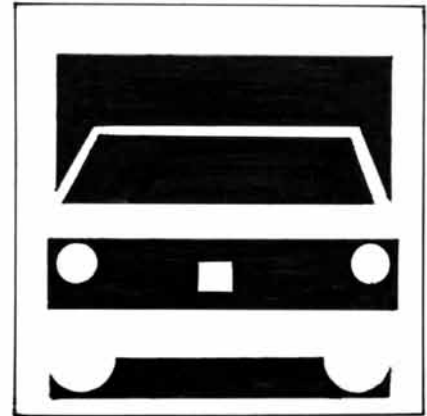
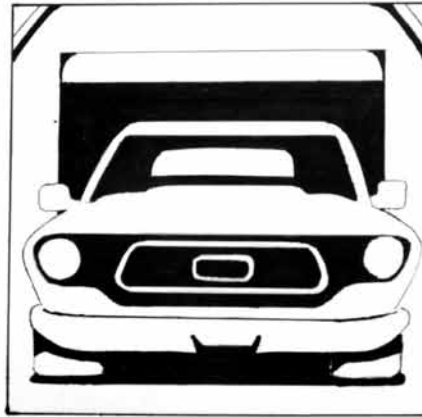
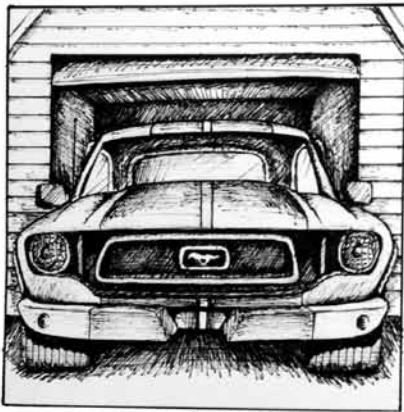


POINTLIZED WAR *Ink*

aka (Explosive Sound Effect)

Sean Logan



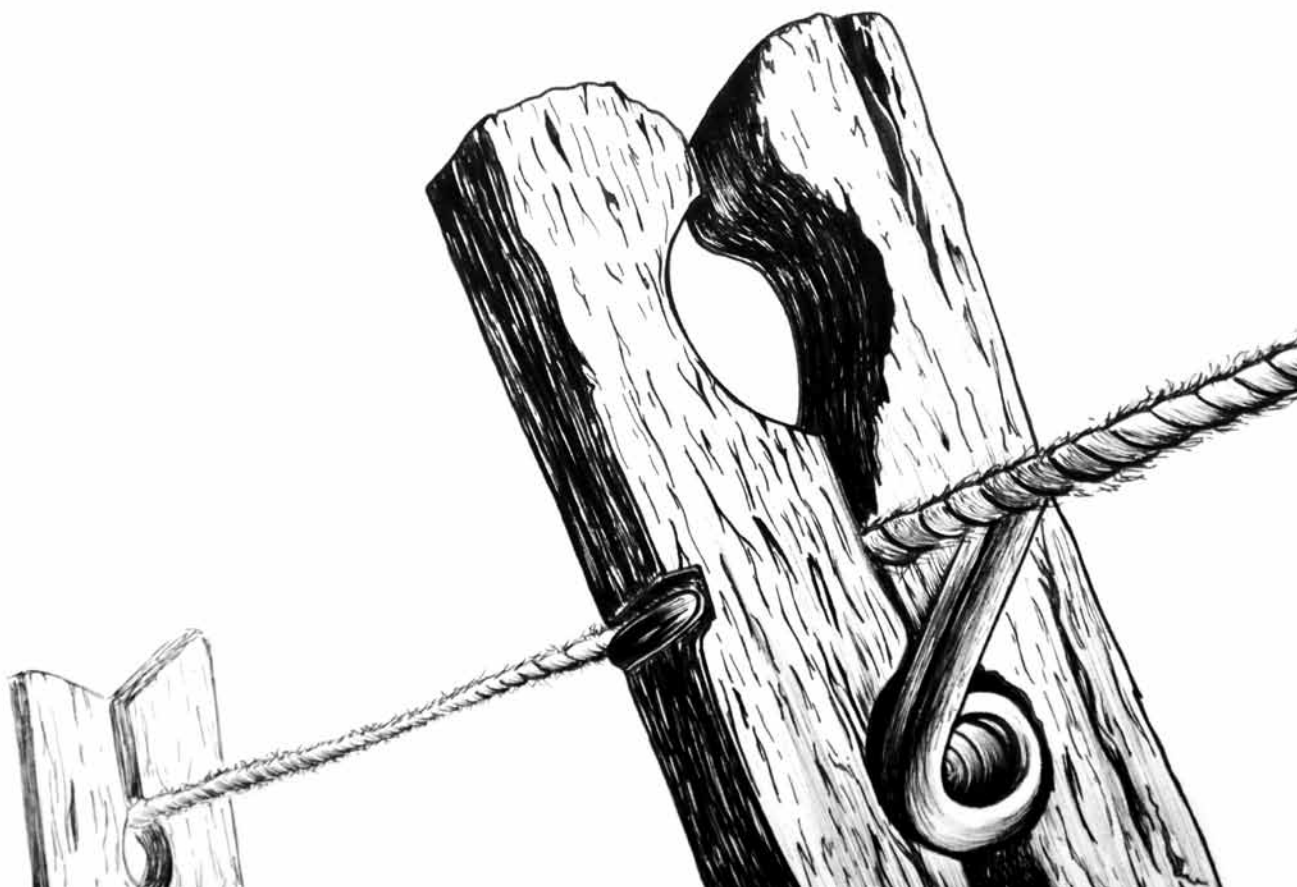


Hunter Erdman

BREAKDOWN OF A MUSTANG

Pen and Ink

HUNG DRY

*Pen**April Harmon*



Charles S. King

Photograph B&W

REDWOOD REACH

Selection of Merit

INTO THE BLUE

Photograph B&W

Melissa Ahlgren





Charles S. King

Photograph B&W

LIFE

Selection of Merit

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I'D SAY IT'S MINIMAL

Ink and White Tape

Ashley Glavach





Tammy Kucharski

Digital Media - Adobe Illustrator CS3

DESIGNED PREDATOR

LIFE ON THE RIO DULCE

Photograph

Twana Pinsky





April Harmon

Pen and Ink

ALLEGRO

Selection of Merit

63

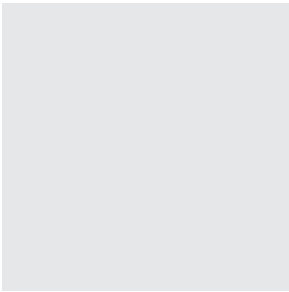
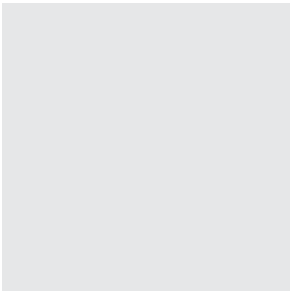
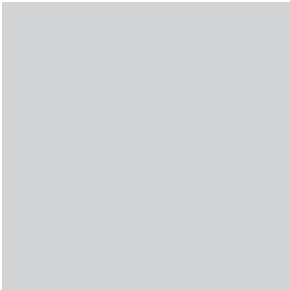
BLUE AND PINK SPOONS

Ceramic

Elizabeth Ullenbruch



MERITED
WRITING



In the corner of the garage,
the saw bites with the sound of
a soft zig, zag through pine branches,
as it always does when my brother is angry,
while music blares from a stereo
hanging from hay string
looped around a barn beam.
Its light spills out to the edges
of the spluttering farm light
on the ancient telephone pole,
reflecting off the snow.
With the racket and ache strumming
through my knee, I set down my pen and limp out
to grab the hatchet and hack away
at logs until the dying wood smoke
from the neighbor's pungent flames cling to my hair
and clothes; two hours later in the raw air,
I hurry inside and write several pages.
The smell of a bonfire
still strong in my hair.

BREATHE

*Poem**Mick Goode*

My sleep is splintered at best.
You haunt my dreams worse than any of the others.
Vengeance does not belong to the Lord; it belongs to you.
In your cool delicate hands, you wield it expertly.
You carve up my dreams; your vivisections filet my soul.
Damn, I wish I could breathe.

The sheets are soaked with sweat;
they reek of sour bitter uselessness.
How I wish I could go back and undo this.
Why didn't I stop to breathe?

I yearn to feel your soft pliant skin beneath my fingers.
To smell the peaches upon your neck, down your cleavage, across your hips.
Aah, to be mesmerized by your eyes once more.
To kiss your sweet lips, hip deep in you...
But the sod is your only blanket – the last thing I gave you.
I would stop breathing, if it would just bring you back.

I'm not wanting forever,
nor to start from the beginning;
all I'd need is five minutes –
to undo the mistake –
to make you breathe again.

I sling sunshine like shotguns
sawed off in painted frames.
strolling through the workplace
I'm lighting up your workspace
correlating the expense vs the income
I'm coming out on top
with a surplus of stars in jars
and little hugs, which I set upon my shelf
I'm rearranging my insides
pills and soft glances
redirecting your looks into feels
and your eyes to the sky
let loose, let fly
I'm growing wings for walking
in attempt to sweep you off your feet

INSIDE IN

*Poem**Elizabeth Anderson*

You cling to the innards of my womb, wrapped in
blood and placenta, protected from the world by my
skin and love and cracking bones.

I feel your future in my belly as
the world caves in around me - Detroit crumbles
before my eyes and flames devour Libya and
other near and distant deserts that remain
unnamed because they are not the fabled
Fountains of Oil.

I feel your future in my belly and I want it there,
but my arms clasp round my roundness
the way yours would if you escaped me.

My child, stay there.

See how my hands clutch my belly now,
as they do any time I watch the news or hear
the rumors flying like crows from tree to naked tree.
I love you already.
I am selfish enough to want you here:
To touch your soft skin, your peach-fuzz hair,
and tickle with my lips the tiny hands and feet
and see the smile in your blue eyes whenever I draw near.

But in front of me I can see the world
and how it would wrinkle and callous your smooth skin.
I love you, and I think perhaps I should leave you be.

The rain stopped about 4:30 PM. The clouds drifted enough to allow a shaft of sunlight through; it hit the yard and house like a spotlight on that dreary November afternoon. Becky Baker stared out her window, for what seemed like the hundredth time. It was their fifth anniversary, and she knew that Paul would be home today, of all days. When last he called, he said he had a surprise for her.

"Paul, what is it?"

"Baby, it's something you wanted. I got it in Tijuana...."

"The only thing I want from Tijuana is you."

"You've had that, this is new..." he stated. "I'll see you next Friday, okay? My bus is leaving. Love you, bye!" and hung up. That was the last she heard from him. That happened Monday, a week before last.

Looking back on it, she thought about how much that quick call disturbed her. At first, she couldn't have stated why; but now, she shivered, as that conversation replayed in her head. It was so scripted, so cliché, so unlike him. He had his moods, but he always kept in touch—before the last fight, she amended.

This silence struck her as strange. Usually he'd come back when he'd cool off, the next hour up to a day later, and sweep her off her feet. That it had been a month didn't feel right. She didn't realize how bad the last fight hurt him. *Damn it, it hurt me too! Those emails from 'Faith', 'Carmen' and 'Beth'; all those naked pictures and videos to our family—only email account. How those women all described his body, down to prick size and his tattoos. Didn't*

he know I would see them? It was like he wanted me to. When he slapped me, I told him to get the fuck out and I was going to file for divorce. I said a lot of things I wish I could have taken back. Becky shook her head. It had been a month since he took off, and the only communication they had was that quick call.

He used to be more fun and romantic. Like the time he picked her up at the school, and took her skiing in Aspen for the weekend. Snow lightly fell, as they pulled up to the cabin. She saw smoke from the chimney, while standing upon the porch with their bags. He opened the door, and carried her in, as if they were just married; then, later that evening, he proposed to her on the rug in front of the fireplace. That was six years ago, but he'd always seem to find that perfect gesture, the right words to melt her in his arms. He ripped up the back yard and put in a fountain, patio, and surrounded it with flower beds, when she went down to Fort Worth to sit with her mom after her heart attack. He did that without asking and without her knowing what he had planned—all because she once mentioned she wanted a back yard like that. The spontaneous getaways to some island or resort, the little gifts for no apparent reason; all the little things he did. She still loved him for that point.

They had their dust-ups, just like every other married couple, but after five years of marriage that was to be expected. No two people can live together without the occasional strife. The making up made her problems seem so trivial; it never occurred to her that he always wound up

on the winning side of the argument, until now. They fought about completing her education, about her going back to her job at Fantastic Sam's, about her family, his spending more than they made, his always being gone, his going out alone drinking and partying when he was off the road. She gave in every time; her dreams and desires all got sacrificed. Everything was about Paul. Becky tried to keep calm, but the more she thought about it, the more this kept festering.

To take her mind off of it, she turned on the TV and flipped through the channels. It seemed that the shows were all about cheating spouses and feuding couples. She left it on some mindless comedy, as she went to take care of the lamb crown roast she made. *Where is he? I made his favorite, and it's now almost eight. He should be here by now.* Becky tended the sides, carved the roast, and let the wine breathe. Waiting another twenty minutes, she decided to eat while it was still warm.

The clock chimed nine. "Crappy anniversary," she toasted herself, as she cleaned the table and put the leftovers away. She had called the airport to check on his flight. *They told me that the last flight from Mexico City came in to Tulsa at six; the airport is an hour and twenty minutes away. Even with traffic, he should've been here an hour ago.* Finishing the last of the Bordeaux she bought for the dinner, she blew out the candles, went upstairs, lay on the bed and wept.

Becky heard what sounded like voices. The clock glowed 10:49. Straining, she heard the voices again. Voices? There was

more than one person skulking around, at least one man and woman. *No one should be in the house but me. I locked the door. Paul always comes in loudly, usually drunk, turning on every light in the house. It isn't Paul.* Reaching into the nightstand, her hand landed on the .38 Paul acquired when they first started living together. The neighborhood of their first apartment was ranked up near the top of the list of worst neighborhoods for crime in the nation. She never liked the gun, but the damned thing had come in handy a few times in the past, and it would now, too.

Easing out of the bedroom, she crept down stairs. The voices were moaning. She peeked through the rails. *There are a couple of people in my house; they're fucking on the rug, in front of the fire... the same rug Paul proposed to me on!* Gun cocked, she eased to the foot of the stairs, aimed her pistol, and said, "Stay where you are." Becky hit the lights, and saw Paul and some Mexican bitch hooked like dogs in heat. "You miserable bastard! When you said you were bringing something home from Tijuana, I never dreamt this. How dare you bring this slut into my home, and nail her on our rug!" she demanded, hand never twitching.

"Baby, let me explain..." Paul said, scrambling to his feet.

"I said freeze!" Becky roared.

"Wait one minute," Paul retorted. "I didn't bring Maria from Tijuana for you; I brought you a divorce. Maria is my bride. This isn't your house; my grandpa left it to me before we met. If anybody's leaving it's you!" as he made it even with the sofa.

"You lying, cheating, backstabbing, son of a bitch! You cruel bastard!" Becky

screamed. She blinked, as Paul wound up on the floor, with two holes in his chest. Maria screamed in Spanish, grabbed the poker, and started for Becky. She made it two steps, when the gun went off again.

Oh my sweet Lord, what have I done? Becky thought as she stood there, surveying the damage. The gun slipped from her hand, and she kicked it away. *If I call this in, there'll be hell to pay. I'm not taking a chance with the Sheriff's department. With the Morgan's being a mile off, maybe they didn't hear it. They might have thought it was thunder. What am I going to do? I'm not going to jail over that cheating son of a bitch. I got to get out of here....*

She ran back upstairs and grabbed her purse and her old cell phone. It still had a Texas number, so her mom could call her without long distance charges. *I got it! I'll make it look like a robbery.* She tore the bedroom up; then she went downstairs to the den, and rifled the desk. She went through the house, knocking things over, like the thieves would be looking for anything of value. Gathering their clothes, she dropped them near the corpses, after taking the marriage license and divorce papers out of his jacket. Looking at her replacement, she stopped cold. Maria could have been her twin. She had same build, bone structure; Maria looked like she did with a full summer tan. She emptied Maria's purse, and took her wallet, along with Paul's. Mindful of the blood, she stepped over the bodies, eased out the door, hopped into her Jeep, pulled out onto Hwy 33 and drove west to I-35.

As the miles and minutes passed, Becky started to breathe easier. The soft rock

station she tuned in played a Little River Band block. 'Cool Change' started, and she sang along. *Time for a cool change.... I know it's time for a cool change.* She got so wrapped up with the song that the flashing lights in her mirror startled her. Pulling over, she shut the engine off, grabbed her license, and tried to act normal.

"Evening, Ma'am. Do you know why I pulled you over?" the deputy asked.

"No sir, I don't. Was I doing something wrong?" she asked, hoping her nervousness wouldn't give her away.

"You have a tail light out, Ma'am. I will need your license, registration, and insurance card please."

Becky handed them over, and watched the deputy in her mirror. *Please let me get out of here! I can't believe this. Everything is going to shit! Clam up and calm down, Rebecca! It's just a goddamned tail light. Take the ticket, thank the officer and drive off. You can do it.* she told herself, taking a cleansing breath, as the deputy walk back to the window.

"Here you go, Mrs. Baker. I'm going to let you go with a verbal warning. How far are you headed, tonight?"

"I'm headed to Norman. My sister's sick, and called me to go help with her kids. I know I'm late..."

"Well, as long as you get to the four-lane, you'll be fine. Plenty of lights and the one light out won't matter. But you get that light fixed, tomorrow, y'heah?"

"Yes sir, I will." She smiled at him, as she put the registration and insurance card in the visor, her license in her purse, and started the engine.

"Drive safely, Ma'am." he told her, as he hopped into his Bronco and took off.

She sat there for a minute, trying to calm her nerves. Shuddering, she turned up the heat, to get the chill out her spine. *Get going, before he comes back. You might not be so lucky the next time.* Hand trembling, she put it in drive, breathing heavily until she hit the freeway. Turning south on 35, she pulled into a truck stop, north of Oklahoma City, and changed her shoes in the restroom; while she was at it, she made sure no blood got on her jeans legs. Satisfied, she put the shoes in one bag, and the wallets, minus the cash in another bag, disposing of them in the dumpster out back of the store, and then she got back on the highway.

Becky followed the signs into Norman, where she drove to her sister's house. She drove a couple of blocks past the house, and circled back; *that way it makes it look like I'm headed north, just in case Teri is up.* The lights, except the one in the kitchen, were out when she pulled into the drive way. Becky figured that she'd tell Teri that she went into Fort Worth and left too late. Hoping the story would fly, she took a breath and knocked on the door.

"Becky, why are you out here at this time of night?" Teri asked, as she ushered her inside.

"Well Paul is still out of town. He didn't make it back for our anniversary, so I spent the day down in Fort Worth. I took a Becky day: doing things like sight-seeing, eating fancy and seeing shows that he doesn't like; before you ask, no, I didn't see Momma. I wasted the whole day on me, and I just don't think I could drive another mile. I hope you don't mind, Teri..."

"What else are big sisters for? I'll fix the guest room." Teri replied, as she hugged

her sister and led her down the hall. "When do you expect him back?"

"I told you about those emails and the fight last month?" Becky asked; Teri nodded, signaling her sister to go on.

"I figured that I'd give him until today to somehow make it up. He didn't. You know, after today, I don't care if he ever comes back. I thought about him, those emails, those sluts, and how he ruined another anniversary... I'm done with his sorry ass! Tomorrow, when I get home, I'm calling that lawyer that did Cheryl's divorce."

"Good for you! I tried to warn you about that bastard before you married him. I remembered what he pulled with Janelle and Lucy before you two started dating. Good riddance, I'd say. Make sure to take him for all that he'll ever be worth." Teri yawned. "Sorry 'bout that. I need to get some sleep, so I can keep the kids quiet in the morning. Are you gonna want breakfast? I know they'll be happy to see you. I'm off to bed. G'nite, Becky."

"Good night, Teri. Thanks for everything." Becky replied, kissing her sister on the cheek. Teri closed the door behind her. Becky lay down on the bed, making plans on how to regain her life. *I could re-enroll at OU, and finish my Business Management degree, then go to work for one of the oil companies. I could change majors, and teach school. Hell, I might even look up Jerry to see if that offer for a business partner still stood.* She stretched, rolled on her side, and dosed off.

Becky bolted upright, hyperventilating and frantically looking around. *Where the hell am I? Why do I feel like I just ran 100 miles?* The sheets felt clammy, and her blouse had a sour sweat stink. She stripped

down to her underwear, and prayed her clothes would be aired out by morning. *Think, Becca! You are safe. You are at Teri and Danny's house. It was too late, and you couldn't drive anymore. Just keep remembering that and to breathe. There is no way they can pin Paul on you.* She finally saw the clock on the dresser. The hands were both on two. Figuring that everyone was asleep, she went to the bathroom and grabbed towels for the bed. Changing the sheets would look too strange. She knew Teri changed linens every Friday at 10:30; *if Teri could, she'd change the calendar to read 'sheet day.'* Becky also came across a Nytol bottle, about half full of pills, in the medicine cabinet. *Is this for you, sis, or for Danny? Maybe these could help....* She went back, put the towels over the wet spots, and flipped the comforter, then lay back down. *These have shrunk since mama used them. They're tiny, so I better take more than one....* She poured half a handful, popped the pills and washed them down. Putting the glass of water on the nightstand, Becky dropped into a deep, dreamless sleep.

At 7:30, the door swung open. Dan and another five officers came in, surrounding the bed, guns drawn. "Becky, wake up!" he commanded. She just lay there. He reached out to shake her shoulder; it felt cold. Then he felt her throat. "Put them away. Fred, call the ambulance." Dan stated, as he went back to the door and hugged Teri.

BUMPER STICKER

*Short Story**Stephanie Priemer*

“If you can read this then flip me over.” Obviously I’m not strong enough, but I was worried and knew someone would need help. The bumper sticker being a pure joke was actually now reality. The jeep slid off the ramp merging from I-94 to I-69. No sirens yet, no one to help. Slowly pulling off to the shoulder I came to realize there wasn’t a driver to the seemingly new jeep. It was upside down, clearly smashed up and shattered glass surround the area. Nothing surrounding the vehicle could explain how it flipped over. It looked as if someone ran the vehicle off the road and cleaned up the mess afterwards. No tire marks, no disturbed snow, nothing to be at fault.

Stepping out of my warm vehicle, I slowly approached the forest green jeep commander. Not knowing what to expect, the smell of new car rushed to my senses. The driver’s window had been kicked out. There’s no way a door was opened to get out of the vehicle. Stepping over the glass I came to find blood. Blood was on shattered pieces of glass, the driver’s seat, the dash board, everywhere. The cross necklace hanging from the rear view mirror was swaying back and forth from the wind and there was a purse dumped out from flipping in the crash. CDs fell from their place and the air freshener was no longer stuck in the vents. After realizing the obvious, all I could think of was where could the driver be?

Oddly enough it took me a few minutes until I realized I heard an engine. The vehicle was still running and music was still playing. The music wasn’t recognizable; it was somewhat of just a melody chiming in the

background. Stepping through the shattered glass, I approached the side of the car farthest from the highway and shockingly found the driver of the vehicle lying there in pain. She was a young girl, dressed in what looked like her Sunday best, and she wasn’t all there. My heart began to beat faster, my lungs seemed to fail in a deep gasp for breath, and my fingers couldn’t work fast enough to dial three single digits on my phone. The poor girl’s head explained all the blood in the vehicle. Her arms were gashed up more than expected, and I still kept asking myself, how? What really happened?

Shaking, screaming, and strict commands seemed to open the young girl’s eyes. Frantically I asked the basic questions. No words followed mine, she was too confused and unsure of whom I was. Calming her down was the most frustrating thing, but I knew it had to be done, and I could hear the sirens coming our way. All she could say was, “My phone, I need my phone.” I ran around the jeep, reached through the broken glass and grabbed her purse, but no phone in there. Something then caught my eye; the blinking LED light of a phone and vibrating as if a new message came through. I then knew why I could read the bumper sticker.

While three pairs of hands pull at my thigh,
I have no choice but to listen to Ben.
He is my pimp and will pay my rent.
Although I am not hooker, I might as well be.
He is known to be a womanizer,
but he need not seduce me.
Just like a hooker, I am the seductress.
I earn his affections through fake smiles and forged laughs,
pretending to be genuine and intrigued by conversations
while my mind falls back to my own obligations.
Just like a hooker, there are no attachments of commitment,
and promises are empty,
and my full pockets do not warrant anyone's envy.
Just like a hooker,
I am familiar with what I sacrifice for Ben,
my time, my pride, my little men.

THE BEAST

Essay

Christine Domaracki

As I toss and turn in my bed, I loathe the thought of having to wake up. Mornings are not my favorite time of day. My bed is warm, with my special touches of a featherbed, down comforter, and six pillows that surround and hug my body, that it makes the task of getting out of bed in my cold basement bedroom nearly impossible. Reality sets in as I hear a familiar sound from the bedroom directly above me: the long, deep howl. It is a sound that makes my breathing stop and my eyes open wide—she knows I am awake. I hear two strong legs meet the hard wood floor, and I can picture the full body stretch as the beast prepares to get off the bed. Her morning routine ends with a whole body shake, which echoes down through the floor boards. I can hear her slowly creep up to the basement doors and shuffle down five steps to check out the situation. The beast sticks her head through the opening in the stairwell to see if I am awake, and if her play time has started. I don't dare move a centimeter, otherwise the game will begin and the loser is already predetermined. Somehow she knows, the beast always knows, and as she grunts, I know the end is coming. Suddenly, a

hundred a forty pounds of pure force erupts into a run down the stairs, and I can see what I call the "crazy" in her eyes as she heads towards me. I hold my breath as I pull my comforter over my head and brace for impact. The beast jumps the length of an Olympic athlete onto my bed, not caring what living thing lies beneath her paws, bringing with her all my sheets and blankets, scrunching them up as they brace her stop, ruining my perfect place of warmth and comfort. It feels as if she is crushing my bones as she lands on them, maybe catching my legs if I am lucky, but usually the beast always goes for the sensitive spots, such as the stomach or the face. Today, I receive a paw right in the head; an automatic win for the beast and a white flag for me. Yet, she is never through the first time, and the torment will repeat until she sees fit, or I receive some critical injury. I finally take cover in my bathroom several feet away, and the beast knows she has won. Our day has officially started. It is days like these I ask myself, "Why did I ever get a Great Dane?"

I have always wanted a dog, and not just any dog, but a big dog, a powerhouse, an eye turner. I have never been fascinated with the

smaller species of the canine breed, what my family and I call "puntables." What is the point in them? Dogs are not meant to be carried in purses; they are not another fashion statement. Nevertheless, I never imagined eighteen months ago this is what my life would be like. I didn't know the trials and tribulations I was getting myself into, and as I reminisce about what it was like to raise her from a seven week old, I realize how much I didn't know.

The first three months of raising a Great Dane is something special that only a fellow Dane owner can understand. Each night when the sun set and the house slept, all she did was grow. Her legs were quickly mistaken for tree trunks, for they were thick, full of muscle, and seemed to grow an inch with every night sleep. She went from being nineteen pounds at seven weeks to fifty pounds by three months old. During this time she went from a cute puppy to the beast I now know. She was constantly biting me, attending to her "business" in the house, trying to test the boundaries of dominance within the family, and eating eleven cups of food a day. I was taking her to the vet every week for updated shots, or else to puppy class for

beast training. Each night, I woke up every two hours to let out a whining puppy that absolutely refused to go to the bathroom in the rain. Since I received my life-long dream in April, this was a major problem. It was as if I just gave birth to a freak of nature that would go down in the Guinness World Book of Records as the largest and most expensive child ever born. I remember one night I was at Taco Bell with my mom, and between my mixture of cries and begging, I got her to eat inside so I could have more time away from the beast. At this point, I was ready to give up, admit defeat, and ask for a refund.

I don't know if things eased up from three to eight months old, or if I just got used to the absolute chaos. A Great Dane in this stage of life is very destructive and acts like a tornado, annihilating everything their path. She ripped up carpet, destroyed shoes, and did everything possible not to listen to any command I threw her way. She was eating about nine cups of food a day, still growing like a weed, and I was almost bankrupt. One sunny day in August, I was enjoying reading a book downstairs with my basement door wall open for a nice summer breeze. I went upstairs to get a snack, and as I looked out the window over the kitchen sink, I captured the beast running around

my yard with my book clenched between her jowls, head whipping back and forth, and the pages of my book being carried off by the wind. I have never run so fast after her and never wasted so much energy, for the beast was faster. Besides all the destructiveness, there was another problem of height I did not foresee. How do you keep a dog that is as tall as the kitchen counter from eating off the kitchen counter? Every one told me just move the food out of reach, and in theory that is a great idea for a normal dog, but nothing is out of reach for a forty six inch tall beast. I was finally putting food on top of the fridge, including whole sticks of butter, which for some reason has turned out to be her favorite snack. I once saw her devour a large, freshly made, steaming hot BBQ chicken pizza off the counter, in about ten seconds. I am still mad at her for that.

When she reached nine months of age, there seemed to be an end in sight. She was fully housebroken, and the hundreds of dollars in puppy classes were finally paying off. The beast was now over one hundred pounds, but she was still expected to grow a little in height and much more in girth. I could see her personality start to shine through—glimpses of a great dog. Activities were not such a hassle anymore, and it became

fun to take her to outdoor malls or to the local parks. People fawn over her, commenting how beautiful she is, and I never get tired of hearing the children say, "Hey look over there! It is Marmaduke!" It is a wonderful feeling to come home after an exhausting day of work, and she is so happy to see me. It makes any problems I might have had melt away. Now she is a hundred and forty pounds of pure love and a part of my family that I could not see living without. Looking back, the experience of raising a Great Dane is truly one I will never forget, and it is the reason why I want another one.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF MRS. RICHARD JOHNSON III: A SUBURBAN CRACK WHORE

Hayley Alderman

Poem

Monday (She thinks)

Mrs. Richard Johnson III

awakens to soft light.

Regret pounding in her head,

her Mother-in-Law pounding at the door.

Stop. Drop. Roll.

Staring up from the hardwood,

the long, white, horizontal shards of glow,

cast by the blinds,

remind her of last night...

until the low baritone of Mrs. Richard Johnson Jr.'s muffler comes alive then fades out,

making it safe to burrow back amongst tangled white sheets.

Thursday

Mrs. Richard Johnson III rolls the Escalade
into the north end AutoSudz.

Soapy bubbles collect on the windshield,
rainbows dance on the leather interior.

Windshield. Wipers. On. Clear the way for anticipation.

Driving to the freshly paved lot behind Neiman Marcus

Looking for “Big MoFo,”

her shaking hands stroke the dead reptile, her purse,
but she leaves empty handed.

Mr. MoFo doesn’t accept plastic.

Tuesday

Mrs. Richard Johnson III’s Pink #12 fingernails go into the PTA meeting,
but they don’t come out.

She gnaws them deftly,
as Marla Miller, the great orator, rants about milk.
2% vs. Whole; the showdown begins.

Excused to the restroom,
pale skin, dark eyes gaze back.
She smears cherry lipstick across an uneven plane.

Saturday

Mrs. Richard Johnson III meets the other half for brunch.
Two pecks, a sit, and an eye-bat later,
“a few hundred” is charmingly requested.

“Honey, you have me in stitches.
What’s next? Shoes? Lingerie?”

Two pecks, a stand, and a grin later,
the alligator gulps down a neat roll of bills.

Wednesday (Sweet Relief)

Mrs. Richard Johnson III looks suddenly
into the wide-eyed faces
of her two elementary school visitors.

Let. Mommy. Rest.

She closes her eyes,
dreams of blackened glass
and puffs of sweet escape.

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES

*Poem**Andrew Rosales*

When I close my eyes, I see
a dark world, different every time.
As time passes on, dots, waves, starbursts simply appear
that change colors and move throughout
the duration of captivity.

When I close my eyes, I see
a world no one else can go to
but me. A different world,
sometimes with trees, beaches and three-leafed clovers.
Full of shock and surprise,
not knowing what's coming around the corner.
Soon to end as it decides.

When I open my eyes, I see
a world full of people and things.
A world far from my eyes, dull I see.
As I want to go to my world of night.

Music rattling car windows,
theirs and their neighbor drivers.
Children playing in open fire hydrants,
open and spilling relief on waiting bodies,
all seen by the porch watchers.
Those watching from their porch,
watching their neighborhood change,
watching the new babies turn into children,
the children turn into teenagers
and if they survive, turn into an adult.
This is my hometown,
this is my Detroit summer.

ROMEO

Essay

Twana Pinsky

"He is an attention whore," were the first words I heard about the new man in my life.

He does not behave as older men do when they age; instead he runs like a hyperactive, five year old child that overdosed on sugar.

His family, forced to separate, agonized over his future. They grieved and wondered what kind of life awaited him. Would he find love and happiness?

I walked up the sidewalk. The sidewalk appeared to grow in length as though it were Pinocchio's nose. It kept getting longer and longer. I felt as though I was walking the "Green Mile" toward doom, instead of walking toward a new beginning. My mind was reeling with doubt. Was I ready for a new relationship? "Do I really want to get my heart broken again?"

You would think I was sixteen again, stressing over a blind date.

Will he like me?

Are we compatible?

Will he get along with the rest of my family?

It had only been two months since the unbearable pain I experienced over the loss of my own loved one. When you lose someone you love, doubts and grieving are a normal part of the recovery process.

Separation is torture for those who through life circumstances are forced to say goodbye to their family member.

Romeo was blissfully unaware that his world as he knew it was about to change.

I found myself again pondering whether or not I was ready. My girl Savannah needed the balance in our household to even out as much as I did. We were both missing something in our lives. Would Romeo prove to be our missing link?

The moment had come. I walked into the living room. Romeo's family was standing there, Dawn, Tessa and her boyfriend, Zack. The mom and her daughter both with puffy eyes and tear streaked faces, clung to Romeo, touching him, loving him, one last time. I felt like I was the evil villain tearing

apart their family. I certainly did not feel like someone that was offering comfort to them that a life had been saved.

I looked at Zack with tears clouding my eyes. It was too much to bear, this their final goodbye, so I stepped outside and waited.

Romeo has been a part of my life now for three months.

Cats are known for being independent self sufficient beings. I am not so sure this is the norm with Romeo. I like to think of him as unique, different from the rest. His traits are reminiscent of Lenny from "Mice and Men." Like the character Lenny, he loves and is devoted to his "George," who happens to be me.

Sharing this with my friend Zack, he laughed and told me that was how Romeo had always been at Tessa's house. Zack explained Romeo was rescued from a shelter. Zack believed he could not have been on his own for long. "He could not have been outside on his own for more than an hour. He is too stupid and would not have made it on his own", said Zack.

Romeo craves attention. He glues himself to my side. We have become so attached; it is as though we are the ones with Siamese genes, not Savannah.

Each day, I am provided with a limitless source of nose kisses, cuddles, and laughs.

"Threesome" has taken on a new meaning for me at bedtime.

Savannah curls up on my chest. Romeo makes bedtime preparations by "fluffing his pillow", which happens to be the space between my pillow, and the headboard.

In actuality, the top of my head has become his pillow with the headboard as his back support,

After he fluffs, circles, and stops to plant one final nose kiss on me, he settles in with a sign of contentment.

I have become the middle, the filling in a very odd Oreo cookie of sorts. As another day draws to a close, I am lulled to sleep by the rhythmic purring on my chest. My other bed partner's tail encircles my head and is draped across my neck, a security blanket of sorts. I sigh. It doesn't get much better than this.

The song fades as the car slows down.
The darkness and movement of the car
Almost lulls me to sleep. The track changes.
Behind my closed eyelids is the color red.
As we start moving, steady notes fill the space.
We start gaining some speed.
The sharp voice enters and it's all I can hear.
She sings of falling,
Falling in love, falling for him, falling for his games.
The song has taken over everything.
My head falls back against the seat as I feel
The rhythm of the music move through me.
My hands rise, fingers dancing to the melody.
We are moving much too fast down the road,
It's as if the beat of the music
Is driving us.
My knees start to move,
Toes tapping to the tempo.
We ride, faster and faster.
The song pushes us farther down the pavement.
I feel us reach the hill,
As we hit the top, as she belts out
*I set fire to the rain!*¹,
A passing car's bright lights hit my face.
Powerful.
I open my mouth and join her.
Together we sing out the remaining words.
As the song slows
We coast, the speed is leaving us as fast as it had come.
More red fills my senses as I hear the last chilling note.

¹ Adele. "Set Fire to the Rain." 21. Columbia Records, 2011.

THE FALL OF AN IRON MAN

Gregory Stroh

Essay

If I were to look back at my childhood, there would be two constant influences in my life: sports and reading. Often, these influences merged because one of my favorite things to read about was sports. When I wasn't playing sports, I was watching them or I was reading about my heroes of the diamond or the field. My true favorites were the football players of the Pittsburgh Steelers of the 1970s and 80s. As time passed, sports took a lesser role in my life, and I had not thought of the Steelers in the context of my youth for years, until the other day.

I was tasked to read an essay where I was surprised to see the name Mike Webster mentioned. This should have taken me on a pleasant trip down memory lane of iconic Steeler images like the "Steel Curtain," Super Bowl championships, and the "Immaculate Reception." It could have reminded me of pictures of men like a smiling "Mean" Joe Greene, a snarling Jack Lambert, and an acrobatic Lynn Swann. Instead, I was met with sadness because I learned that one of my childhood heroes, Pittsburgh Steelers Hall of Famer, "Iron" Mike Webster, was dead. From this essay and other information I have recently reviewed, I now think of football in a new way—as the vehicle of death for Mike Webster. For him, and other athletes of contact sports, the repeated head trauma that they suffer is a contributing cause of their death.

The 2011 essay I read, "Does Football Have a Future," by *New Yorker* author, Ben McGrath, is a discussion of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or C.T.E. The article points out that C.T.E. "was first diagnosed, in 2002, in the brain of ... Mike Webster" and is brain damage that

occurs from repeated major and/or minor head trauma. This trauma is the result of the collisions that athletes are subjected to during the course of their athletic careers, McGrath explains. His article also contains interviews from players, coaches and doctors who are concerned about the effects that repeated head trauma has in athletes.

In his article, McGrath discusses some of the efforts made to make football safer, both historically and now, and he details some of the research being conducted on C.T.E. One such effort is being led by another reporter, Alan Schwarz. McGrath introduces Schwarz's efforts to bring the issue of C.T.E. and concussions in football players into the light of the mainstream media. McGrath credits Schwarz for starting a national dialog about brain injuries in football by writing a front page article, "Expert Ties Ex-Player's Suicide to Brain Damage from Football," in the *Times* on January 18, 2007. This article described the brain of Andre Waters, another former pro footballer, "as resembling that of an eighty-five-year-old man with Alzheimer's," despite being just forty-four at the time of his death.

Depression and suicide are recurrent themes in McGrath's article, which chronicles two other suicides amongst football players. Another former player mentioned in McGrath's article is Ted Johnson. At just thirty-four, Johnson displays "impairment that is characteristic of early Alzheimer's disease," according to Dr. Robert Cantu. Johnson traces the source of his trouble to a 2002 concussion and returning to practice too soon. The report includes Johnson having depression-like behavior, such as "locking himself in his

apartment ... for days at a time."

While I had not entirely missed the recent discussion of head injuries in sports, McGrath's article presented new information to me. I was unaware that Mike Webster had died in 2002, and I had not known about C.T.E. in particular. McGrath points out enough information to convince me that C.T.E. is a serious condition. In the case of Webster and Waters, there is proof that there are actual physical changes to these player's brains that cannot be explained in other ways. McGrath documents another fact that is hard to ignore: "retired N.F.L. players are five to nineteen times as likely as the general population to have received a dementia-related diagnosis," according to Schwarz.

These are all compelling arguments that head injuries need more attention. As I read the article though, I questioned the conclusion that the head trauma led to the deaths of these athletes. McGrath documents that Webster died of a heart attack and Waters died of suicide. So how does this tie into his premise that their brain injuries contributed to their demise? Another point of concern is that an autopsy is required to confirm C.T.E., McGrath's article points out. Therefore, players like Johnson, are unable to confirm C.T.E. although they are certainly suffering brain complications. One other question not covered in the article was the impact substance abuse may play in the links to depression, suicide, and changes in the brain. However, there is another report on football that parallels McGrath's sentiments, examines these issues further, and helped answer some of my questions.

In his presentation, "Head Games," that aired on CBC-TV in 2008, reporter Bob

McKeown, of *The Fifth Estate*, alleges that not only is head trauma contributing to footballers deaths, it's killing them "decades before their time." He also says there is "ample evidence" that the lives of football players are shorter than the lives of their non-football counterparts by "20 years." McKeown chronicles the careers, lives and deaths of three Canadian Football League teammates. All three died in their fifties, and there were reports of substance abuse and/or depression in each of their lives as well as the ever-present concussions. Although their brains were not examined, an expert suggested it was "reasonable" to assume that they suffered from C.T.E.

McKeown also records more details of Mike Webster's life in an interview with Garrett Webster, Mike's son. Garrett described his father as "extremely depressed" and said that his father used a taser to try to stop his "chronic pain" before his death of heart attack at just 50 years old. Dr. Bennet Omalu, concludes that Webster's brain "was positive for advanced dementia," a condition that normally plagues the elderly. Further documented by McKeown is that Dr. Omalu, along with Dr. Julian Bales, went on to examine the brains of three other former National Football League players. These three all committed suicide and each of their brains displayed signs of advanced dementia in their autopsies as well, McKeown's story cites. The odds of it happening "by chance" were "a million to one" according to Dr. Bales.

Like McGrath, McKeown also reports on athletes other than football players. McKeown discusses wrestler Chris Benoit who killed his wife and son before hanging himself in 2007. According to McKeown's report, Dr. Omalu and Dr. Bales said Benoit's brain "was the most damaged they'd seen, like that of an eighty-five year

old with advanced dementia" though Benoit was decades younger.

McGrath's and McKeown's reports make a case that is hard to dispute. Additionally, because his report was a taped presentation, I was able to hear and see from Ted Johnson, Dr. Bales and Dr. Omalu for myself. Each provides credible testimonies to the problems in sports of repeated head trauma. The concrete evidence of dramatic changes in the physical structure of the brain, as verified by Dr. Bales, is undisputable. I am convinced of the trauma being linked to sports when the odds of it having another explanation are a "million to one" in the words of Dr. Bales.

As for the question I had of the link explaining the depression and suicide from head trauma, McKeown's report answered it in no uncertain terms in an interview with Dr. Jim Adams. He had been the team trainer for the three CFL teammates that died in their fifties of suicide, organ failure, and a fall. He finds it "reasonable to assume a link to head injury" and ties head injury to their deaths in this way: The head trauma contributes to their deaths by the loss of "insight" in concussion victims. This loss of insight leaves the concussion victims more prone to substance abuse and without the insight to recognize their problem or what to do about it. Therefore, the head trauma incurred from sports was killing these athletes by rendering them unable to look out for themselves and to correct their situations.

I will concede that all the questions surrounding these men's deaths may never be answered. Steroid abuse is another problem that may have contributed to these men's untimely deaths, but if there is another logical explanation to the cause of the changes to their brains, it eludes me and

those interviewed in these two reports.

McGrath asks if football was a "sport with no future?" I say no, that football's leadership changed the game when it needed to before, and I believe they will again. With better understanding of the problem players face, I have faith that a solution to the head injury problem will be found. Football, for all its faults, is still worth saving. It is an instrument of discipline, teamwork and comradely fun. It can be a source of personal accomplishment, community pride, and it often captivates a nation. It provides athletic scholarships for those that may not otherwise be able to attend college. However, until we have better answers and better means of looking out for our athletic heroes, football will be tarnished to me. I will still continue to love it, but not as freely or without remorse as I had in the past.

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FOUR DAYS

*Poem**Hillary Smith*

Friday: My sister calls, her voice trembling; something isn't right.
Nick has drowned; nothing could be done.
Breathless, thoughtless, frozen; what can I do?
Six hours away in Chicago; I can't go home.
Longest, darkest drive back to my grandparents' house.

Saturday: We go shopping at Marshalls.
I wander down the men's aisle looking at the t-shirts and shorts.
Remembering how Nick would always wear those no matter what the weather was outside.
And I would be outside with him, having a blast.
I'm imagining the good times we would have when I get back.
Shooting hoops, playing monopoly, enjoying summers with Nick.
Using the sun to tell time; no worries in the world.
Can't wait to go home to see my friend.

Sunday: Time to go home.
Sitting in the back of the white car, staring aimlessly into the gray motionless clouds.
Replaying the phone call in my mind: Nick has drowned; nothing could be done.
Nick's showing is in less than 12 hours.
Slowing down, pulling in the driveway; about to see my friend for the last time.
Getting ready, holding back the tears; then I break.
I cry, I scream.

We arrive; the room is filled wall to wall with Nick's family and friends, I can't get to him.

I just want to say goodbye.

His five year old twin sisters stand on a stool; leaning over the casket looking at him.

I stand at the end of the casket, waiting.

They run off; my feet slide on the ground, moving closer and closer to the front.

I stop.

His eyes closed.

His red hair going in all directions.

His head slightly propped up on a pillow.

A fine powder covers his face.

A rosary wrapped around his soft, small, delicate hands.

Five Pixie Sticks lay in his breast pocket; green, blue, yellow, orange, pink; his favorite candy.

An angel in waiting.

Monday: The funeral is today.

The clock strikes 11; it has started.

But I'm in class thinking what the hell am I doing.

First day of college, or friend's funeral.

I've made the wrong decision.

SOME LOVE

Short Story

Bethany Wolf

I sucked in my breath and pulled myself off the couch. There had been a knock at the door, and I was expecting way too much Chinese for just me. My eyes scanned the small, messy apartment for where I might've dropped my purse last night. It was the first time I'd been back in nearly a month. Everything was exactly how I had left it. It was a little creepy, almost as if the last month of my life hadn't happened at all. *Good. I wish it never had!* I thought bitterly as I located my purse on the floor by the front door.

I pulled a couple bills out, opened the door, and saw *him* standing there. My breath hitched. I internally chastised myself, fighting against the feelings.

"What do you want?" I asked harshly. "No, you know what? I don't care. Just leave, I'm expecting someone."

"The Chinese came like ten minutes ago," he confessed in a small voice. "I paid the guy and have been standing here trying to work up the nerve to knock since he left."

"Then give me my food and leave." I held out the money; I was waiting for him to finally accept it. He looked at my hand then back to my face; I sighed and shoved the money into my pocket. "Give me the bag." His mouth opened, but he didn't speak; instead, he reached around me to place it on the counter beside my door.

Once his hand was empty he pulled his fingers through his short brown hair, a habit that I thought I would never get tired of seeing. He scratched the back of his head, a look of determination crossed his face, "Please, just let me try and explain—"

"No. Just leave, I don't want you here," I interrupted. "You don't need to try and explain anything. I get

it. I'm not 'that girl,' and I never will be. This is me, okay, messed up hair and sweatpants; it's who I've always been and probably who I'll always be. I can't be what you're supposed to have, ball gowns and flawlessness." I was tired of pretending.

"I don't care about all that stu—"

"Seriously?" I talked over him again, now wanting to bring it up. Just so he would know how much it had hurt me. "Then what was the point? This whole time," I heard my voice crack and shook my head, not knowing how to finish; I didn't want to talk about clothes and hair. "I fell for you, okay? I know that wasn't part of our deal, but it happened. And after last night, I know that it was clearly a mistake. I mean, I thought I knew everything there was to know about you, but obviously I was wrong. I mean you don't even know me, why would you? Getting to know me was never part of our agreement. With everything being a huge lie, how could I ever have expected there to be anything real between us?"

"It wasn't all a lie." He spoke, trying to fix what had been broken. "I do know you."

"Right," I scoffed. "Like that my favorite color is orange and my favorite pizza topping is sausage? No, you wouldn't know that because you never bothered to learn." I clenched my jaw, angry at myself for actually telling him this. I wanted it to be a clean break with both of us just going our separate ways, back to the way things were before we met. I should have realized that there is no such thing as a clean break, hearts never break evenly.¹

"No. You're right, I didn't know that. But I do know that you can only fall asleep if you're on the right side

of the bed on your stomach.” He took a step closer to me, and I stepped back so he was no closer than before. “And I know that you like to punch things when you get excited, and that you hate wearing heels.” Another step closer, but this time I couldn’t find the strength to move. “I also know that the falling in love wasn’t part of the deal, but you weren’t the only one who fell.” He was close. Close enough to touch. Close enough to kiss.

We had only kissed that one time, in front of his family, to convince them.... It would be so easy to do, such a small distance. He wrapped his hand in my messed up hair, drawing me closer, almost closing the space. Almost.

Somewhere within me I knew that kissing him now would only make things more complicated. I pushed my hands against his chest and stepped back. “Thank you, for that,” I whispered. “I’m still mad, but thank you.”

He sighed, regret coloring his features. “I know; you should be. I’m sorry; I never meant to hurt you....”

“And yet you did,” I shook my head. Even after he said those sweet words to me I still needed to process what had happened. “I think I just need to be alone, sort this through on my own...for a little while, you know?”

I watched his face fall, but he didn’t disagree with me. “You’re right. I need to sort things through too... and have a long talk with my mother,” he said with another sigh.

“Yeah, you should...so I’ll see you later,” I told him, stepping back even farther from him.

“Later?”

I nodded, “I’ll call you when I’m ready, don’t,” I

struggled with what to say before I realized there wasn’t much I could say besides, “just don’t.”

“Try not to take too long,” he said with a sad, small smile.

“I’ll try,” I felt the tears in my eyes, but refused to let them out in front of him. “Goodbye,” I said softly as I shut the door firmly behind him. I sucked in a shaky breath and leaned against the door.

Some time later I finally made it back to the couch with my food. As I was about to start eating, I heard the text message alert chime on my phone and found it between two of the couch cushions.

“I’ll take the messed up hair and sweatpants over ball gown and fancy hair every time.”

I sighed quietly, dropping the phone beside me and turning my attention to the dull hum of the television.

¹ The Script. “Breakeven.” The Script. Phonogenic Records, 2008.

WHEN THE WORD NAP

*Poem**Nikki Roulo*

When word *nap* sent
me shrieking in protest
to create a tent from sheets
staked under the mattress
to hide the glow of the book light
I never considered that it was a treasure.
Now, cheek pressed against rough
Berber carpeting with a blue threadbare
blanket wrapped around my shoulders,
my thumb traces the cursor's penciled path to save
the molten forgings of word after steel word;
I take the cold coffee and the remainder of a biscuit
and finish them before my eyelids fall shut.

Sometimes at Night
I fall asleep praying to God.
I wake up and ask his forgiveness.
I find it rude to fall asleep when speaking to someone so important.
Yet, I won't read the bible,
at least not all at once.

And still, I like to think God has cared for me.
Isn't that what they all say?
"God has been good to me."
What makes me so blessed?"

Being close to God is euphoric.
And yet I praise him when I please.
To fall asleep during a thank you makes
me seem so...
unappreciative, disrespectful,
so sorry. And I ask his forgiveness.

FAT

*Poem**Elizabeth Anderson*

An Italian grandmother is in the kitchen with
white hair, bright brown eyes, hooked nose,
and a food-laden table:

Eggplant Parmesan, stuffed portabellas,
bruschetta, tomato sauce, pepperoni—
everything with garlic,
a tiny dark kitchen reeking of garlic,
garlic in everything,
forty cloves at least—

and a dark-haired extended family,
fifty people,
each going on two-hundred and fifty pounds—
to whom she says,
You must eat more!
You're wasting away!

At her funeral, the priest remembers
the cookies she used to bring him.
She fed the community.
Her epithet should be:
Here lies our Cook,
to whom no one was fat.



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